ROPER'S ROW

WARWICK DEEPING

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ROPER'S ROW

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ROPER'S ROW

George

BY WARWICK DEEPING

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To
The Memory
of
My Mother

Roper's Row

Chapter One

I

THE girl was tempted by the open door. It was unusual for Hazzard to leave his door open. His habit was to shut it quietly and carefully, for like many other doors in Roper's Row it had seen better days, and was suffering from decrepitude, strained hinges and a stammering lock. Hazzard knew the habits of that door. Unless you were firm with it and made sure that the catch had caught, the door would swing slowly back into the room, uttering a little creaking moan. It was a faithless, treasonable door. It was ready to betray you and your secrets, and Hazzard had many reasons for wishing to keep the door closed.

Ruth Avery was tempted. She had occupied the upper floor front of No. 7 Roper's Row for less than a month, but the occupant of the back room was as secretive as his door. She heard him go up and down the stairs; he had a lame leg and a walk that, with its broken rhythm, resembled the sounds of the human heart as heard by the doctor's ear—"Lub-dup, lub-dup." She had met him once on the stairs, a little, dark, pale young man with a big head and defiant hair, and a something in his eyes. He had stood aside to let her pass. He had neither looked at her nor spoken to her. He had that air of unfriendliness which is a man's defence against the unfriendliness of other people.

She thought—"I oughtn't to—but I want to," and being a woman she tiptoed across the worn linoleum and looked in, for the room was empty. It had furniture of a sort, but furniture that seemed to emphasize the room's air of emptiness. There was an iron bedstead covered with a pink cotton quilt, a table by the window that had once been painted black, and a wash-hand-stand against a wall that had once been a liverish yellow. She saw a strip of red matting, two sugar-boxes, one on top of the other, with their lids converted into doors. She saw a deal shelf hung by a cradle of string, and lined with shabby books. She saw two bedroom chairs, and the cane seat of one of them suggested that a foot had been thrust through it. There was a hanging cupboard behind the door, but the door hid it from her eyes.

Two objects in the room arrested her attention: a white marma-

lade pot full of red roses on the black table, and a violin hanging from a nail driven into the wall. She was surprised to see the roses, for roses cost money in London. Also she had not expected to see a violin. She had never heard a violin being played in that back room, and she would have preferred the sound of it to the chattering music of her typewriter. But the roses enchanted her; she saw them against the blue-grey murk of a slate roof; she had been born and bred in the country, but she had not loved flowers then as she loved them now. She went quickly into the room, and taking the white jar in her two hands, put her mouth to one of the flowers, and inhaled the perfume.

Memories rushed to her. Surely these were cottage roses, country flowers, not city madames? Roses, and hay, and the smell of bean fields, and lilac and white May, and the scent of the bluebells in the beechwoods! And then she nearly dropped the jar, realizing that someone was standing behind her.

"Oh,—I'm so sorry, your door was open, and I happened to see the roses."

She replaced the pot on the table, and with tremulous, sensitive lips, and a flickering of her lashes, made her confession.

"It was awfully wrong of me, but I couldn't resist."

He was looking at her with those curious, still, dark eyes of his. She noticed that he was in his socks, grey socks. She wondered why.

"All right. I had gone down to get the Bunce girl to take my boots to be mended. You can have the flowers—if you like——"

He was abrupt, casual. His very confession concerning his boots was wilful and challenging. He had only one pair of boots, and she might just as well know it. But she, a little frightened, and very conscious of his dour, fixed stare, felt that life—somehow—was piteous and deplorable.

"Really, I couldn't."

He limped round her and across the room, picked up the white pot, and held it out with a thrust of the arm. It was as though he pushed the flowers at her, while saying—"Take them, get out and go. I'm busy."

"All right. My mother sent them. They'll last a day or two. But you might return the pot."

She took the white jar in her hands, and with a half-protesting look at him, got herself out on to the narrow landing. She was still standing there when he closed his door.

II

Christopher Hazzard took off his coat. It was a warm June evening, but he removed his coat because clothes were precious, and because he was about to prepare the meal that contrived to be both tea and supper. Opening the deal doors of the two sugar-boxes he took out an oil-stove, a kettle, half a loaf of bread and a wedge of Dutch cheese, a white milk-jug, two blue plates, a brown teapot, and a spoon and a knife with a black handle. He arranged them on the table. The paraffin stove was kept scrupulously clean, otherwise the smell of those Wiltshire roses would not have lingered. His arranging of the meal was deft, precise, almost meticulous, as though it was part of his self-discipline to make the most of the little that he had.

There were footsteps on the stairs, and someone knocked.

"Hallo."

"Ol' Bibs saith he wanth sixpunth more."

"Why? Last time."

"A patch or suthing."

"All right."

The Bunce girl opened the door. She was seventeen, sallow, colourless as to hair and lips, with the open mouth and pinched nostrils of a child whose throat had never been attended to. Hazzard was filling the tin kettle, and the girl watched him with pale, slate-coloured eyes that seemed to droop from under the flaccid upper lids. Hazzard's dark and aggressive head was outlined against the sky. His head and his dexterous, strong hands were the only impressive things about him. He was a little fellow, narrow shouldered, fragile, and lame.

"Want sixpence, do you?"

"Yeth, Mr. Hathard."

Putting the tin kettle on the stove, and returning the ewer to its basin, he felt in a trouser pocket and produced some coppers.

"Can't get on without boots, Phelia."

She blinked her heavy eyes at him.

"The kettle's boilin' downthstairs. If you like——"

He was counting out pennies and halfpennies, and he did not look at her when he answered.

"Thanks, Phelia. I'm an independent little brute. Got to be somehow. There you are. Better get a receipt from Old Bibs. Don't trust a soul in this world."

"Lor', Mr. Hathard—we ain't all thieves."

He gave her a quick and half-ironic stare.

"That's so. Thank you."

He was lighting the oil-stove when the Bunce girl closed the door, and her closing of it was gradual, the lingering effacement of a figure that provoked her young curiosity. For Hazzard was an oddity in Roper's Row, though there were other oddities, clean and unclean, obscure, shabby, secret people. They might have been divided into those who had not quite enough to eat, and those who drank too much. In Roper's Row the penny was a coin of some significance. Hazzard paid three and sixpence a week for that top-floor back room, and Ophelia Bunce happened to know that he "paid reg'lar." The room had no fireplace, or rather the fireplace had been boarded up, but then Hazzard never indulged in a fire. In winter he sat and read in his overcoat. His feet got stone cold, but that was to be expected when you were using your brain.

His view from the upper window of No. 7 had a circumscribed variousness, and a bizarre beauty of its own, perhaps because there was so much curious detail in it, and Hazzard the medical student was learning to let no details elude him. He looked out on the backs of three other rows of houses all of the same soft sootiness, and upon a collection of chimney-stacks and chimney-pots, back-yards, and spaces that were called gardens. In one of these gardens a black poplar had grown and flourished; its restless, flickering leaves gave a sense of green movement in the midst of all that blackened brickwork, and Hazzard liked to watch the flicker of the leaves. It was a change from looking at crooked chimney-stacks and comparing them to strumous children with curvature of the spine.

When the meal was over he washed up, using an old white slop-pail as a sink. He dried everything and put it away, gave the stove a wipe with a rag, and closed the doors of his sugar-box cupboards. He did not smoke, because he could not afford tobacco, nor was he to be pitied because there is no pain in doing without that which you have never enjoyed. Hazzard's joy was his work; he lived for it and starved for it, and was despised and disliked for it by those middle-class young men who loved their own bodies. For, in his own way, and at that time of his life, Hazzard had all the climber's happiness.

Getting down a book from the shelf and taking a notebook from the table drawer he set to work. He could read for hours on end. He had an extraordinary memory, probably because he remembered with passion. At "Bennet's" he was loathed, because he was such a scrub and so abominably efficient, and played no games

and was so obviously a child of the people. He knew that he was loathed.

His work was soundless. Not so the work on the other side of the landing. The click-click of Ruth Avery's typewriter obtruded itself upon his consciousness. She was a typist somewhere in the City, and added to her income by doing odd work in the evenings when it happened to come her way. Hazzard had noticed the card hung up in the window of Mrs. Bunce's newspaper shop: "Miss Avery. Typing done."

He sat and listened. The sound did not disturb him either mentally or emotionally. And presently the clicking of the keys and the ping of the bell ceased. He heard her door open. She went down the stairs; she was going out.

He did not trouble to wonder whether she had any object. He went on reading. He could not go out on that particular evening because his boots were being repaired.

III

Naturally, Christopher Hazzard had no sense of the romantic, but he was very much alive to beauty. A Wiltshire boy from one of those green valleys where the Avon winds among the chalk hills, he had come to know as a child the wildness and the loneliness and the mystery of great spaces. For he had been a lonely child, and a persecuted child, a cripple, one of those sensitive creatures who are designed to be hunted by little round-headed savages.

Mary Hazzard—his mother—had kept a small general shop at Melfont, and to Christopher his mother was all that the rest of the world was not. She was very old now, and the shop had passed into other hands, and Mary Hazzard had retired into a little white cottage with a thatched roof at the southern end of Melfont village, with the feet of its garden in the Avon, and its western windows looking up towards the high pastures. One of those dark, grave, silent women, her very black hair still retained its colour, and her skin had a fine whiteness. The mother of a lame and a delicate child she had been more than a mother to him in the flesh. She had known him to come back to her with anguish and shame, breathing fast and hard, afraid but fighting to conceal his fear.

She had heard the voices of other children hounding him to the very gate of his home.

"Cowardy—cowardy custard——"

"Hobbledy—hobbledy—— Look at his boot."

For Christopher was unusual, and to be unusual is to arouse the mistrust and the dislike of the crowd, be the members of it men or children. Also, Mary Hazzard was unusual, and that is perhaps why she understood her son. Her pride—with flashing eyes—had taken its stand behind his. Very early she had realized him as something unusual, partly because of his lame leg, but chiefly because of his unlame mind. He had not been made for the ploughlands or the smithy or the carpenter's bench, nor had she seen him behind the counter of a village shop. There was more in Christopher than that, and so she put penny to penny, and sent him to school, while earning for herself the reputation of being a skinflint. She was unpopular, because she had a dark reserve, and did not gossip, and was above herself according to her neighbours.

"Them Hazzards."

Yes, them Hazzards, mother and son, were peculiar people, but Mary knew her world, and how few people there are in it who really matter to you, and that the great mistake is to think that everyone matters. Christopher went to school; he carried off prizes; his mother kept them on a shelf in her bedroom. He was a dark child, reserved and silent and watchful in the face of the world, but to his mother he was otherwise. He was solitary, but not with her. On his holidays it had been his pleasure to go up to the hills with the shepherds, or to watch birds, or to take a book and lie in the shade of one of the old grey stones of the Melfont cromlech. Always, those days, he had been reading or watching things. He had curious, deep eyes, both very still and very bright.

There had been a very frank understanding between mother and son.

"Kit, what I'm asking is that you'll never make me look a fool."

"That's a promise, mother."

Their two prides held hands. Each inspired and rallied the other. His mother had defied the world in defying the littleness of Melfont. "She thinks she's going to make a gentleman of him, does she!"—"I do hear he's for being a doctor?" Cluckings, and grimaces, and rustic irony, but Christopher, who had been persecuted in his younger days, understood his mother's pride. She did not wish to be made to look a fool, and to have her neighbours kindly grinning in her shop. And Christopher, with the teeth of his soul well set, had promised himself and her that failure should not come back to roost in Melfont.

IV

Mary Hazzard's effort had culminated in the paying of her son's hospital fees, and not only had she paid these fees, but she had managed to allow him ten shillings a week. Ten dear, bitter, blood-stained shillings, but she was an old woman now and could do no more. For it takes five years to make the very beginnings of a doctor, and the boy had to eat and sleep, and text-books cost money, and the world expects a clean collar.

Christopher would think of these things as he sat at his window. During the last year he had become aware of his mother as a woman grown suddenly very old and white of skin; her eyes were the same as ever, but when he looked at her face he felt strange pangs and the stirrings of a fierce compassion. It seemed to him that like the mythical pelican she had fed him upon her life blood. He did not know, but he may have suspected that she had gone short of food for years, and now that the shop and its goodwill were sold she had both less and more to give. If it was a case of Christopher against the world, it was also the case of a young man inspired by a double purpose. He could say to himself, "When I'm qualified, when I can make money, it will be my turn."

Chapter Two

I

At six o'clock Hazzard took down the violin and bow, and wrapping them in a piece of black cloth such as working tailors use, put on his hat, locked his door and descended the stairs.

Ruth Avery, idle at her window, heard him go down the stairs, and leaning out saw him appear in Roper's Row. Already she had come to associate the hour of six with the emerging of that little black limping figure into the passage below. There were the evenings when he carried that black affair under his arm, and the evenings when he wore an overcoat and a white scarf. She supposed that the overcoat concealed something, which it did, a second-hand dress suit bought at a second-hand clothes shop in Red Lion Street. Challenged to imagine what the piece of black cloth might hide, she remembered the violin that she had seen hanging on the wall, and so allowed herself to wonder whether he gave a part of his evenings to playing in some orchestra.

Roper's Row had no roadway. It was a broad, paved passage lined with shabby little shops that sold fruit and groceries, and fish, and old clocks and prints and oddments, and newspapers, stationery, and second-hand books. At six o'clock it was full of children playing and shouting, and getting in the way of their elders, but Hazzard took no notice of these youngsters. Shouting children roused in him unhappy memories. He walked fast, keeping his eyes upon a distant greenness that were the trees in Gray's Inn, for Roper's Row was fortunate in having an open space and trees both east and west of it. The planes of Gray's Inn balanced the plane trees of Red Lion Square.

Hazzard varied his route. Sometimes he used the Clerkenwell Road; on other evenings he followed Gray's Inn Road, and working his way across to Myddelton Square, turned down into St. John Street. In St. John Street stood a public house, "Bunch of Grapes," and Hazzard, entering by a side door painted in brown to imitate grained wood, and walking along a dark passage, emerged into a big bare room behind the bar. Here, on a little raised platform, he joined a red-faced man with a banjo, and a hunch-backed little fellow who played the flute. The three of them

formed the "Bunch of Grapes" orchestra, hired by an enterprising proprietor for the benefit of his clients.

The banjoist was in charge. He had a succulent, red face, and a voice that rolled oleaginously from under a fair, drooping moustache. He sang music-hall songs, and sentimental songs, and dirty ditties when the room and the audience had grown warm and well oiled. He always led off with three taps of the right foot, a clearing of the throat, and a "Now then—gentlemen." The flutist was never seen to smile. He sat there rather like a little wizened monkey, blowing at his flute with an air of dark melancholy. Hazzard, with the smell of beer and sawdust and hot humanity in his nostrils, and his violin tucked under his chin, observed life with a kind of ironic gravity. The banjoist's name was Bangs; he had glutinous movements, an eternal smile, and an exuberant good humour. He was very popular with the men and the women who sat at the wooden tables covered with American cloth. Always he was addressed as Mr. Bangs.

"Tell us a tale, Mr. Bangs."

And Mr. Bangs would tell a tale, pulling the ends of his big and drooping moustache, and winking one blue eye, and striking occasional and dramatic or suggestive notes on the banjo. He had an arch way of plucking at the strings when producing an innuendo.

"That's where they pulled down the blind"—or "So—I ordered a bathin' machine—for two."

The laughter in the room was like a hot breath laden with alcohol. Hazzard would sit with his violin across his knees and watch those gargoyle faces. Little Lardner the flutist would close his eyes and rock gently on his chair. He appeared to withdraw himself into abstracted meditation; but at the end of one of Mr. Bangs's stories, and in the midst of the splurge of laughter, he would come to himself with a hissing sound, a breath drawn in sharply through closed teeth.

"Silly swine——"

Sometimes there was dancing. A man and a woman would get up and face each other, and looking each other in the eyes with a kind of smeary and set smile, go through movements that were like Bangs's voice, glutinous and strangely deliberate. To Hazzard they suggested people trying to move their feet in a medium that had the consistency of treacle.

For his share in the evening's entertainment he received half a crown and a glass of beer. He would return to Roper's Row, wash out his mouth, put his head in cold water, and sit down to read till midnight.

Other evenings that were more civic and decorous took him to Dando's Hotel in Fleet Street, and at Dando's Hazzard handed round tomato soup, roast and vegetables, apple tart and custard, to the middle classes instead of providing music for the masses. Dando's was much used by clubs and fraternities for their weekly, monthly, or yearly dinners. They were very hearty occasions, with much oratory, and Hazzard, who had cultivated an ascetic stomach, used to wonder how such well-fleshed people could manage to eat so much. Also, having a rather fantastic fancy, he would see in the diners so many rounds of beef or roast legs of mutton dressed up in white collars. But he was kept very busy on such evenings. It was "Waiter" here—and "Waiter" there, and the room was badly ventilated. He sweated. Often he would go back to Roper's Row with a wet shirt and an aching head, but with a few shillings in his pocket.

A fellow "occasional" at Dando's, who was a packer of books during the day, had put Christopher up to the happy method of extracting tips.

"Don't be in a 'urry, my lad. Wait till they're warm. If they're whiskyish, wait till the whisky's got 'em. Then—you go and lean over confidential like and whisper, ' 'Ope I've looked after you to your satisfaction, sir.' "

Hazzard had a purpose and a passion that were stronger than mere superficial pride. He would bend and utter those words, "I hope I have looked after you, sir, to your satisfaction." In nine cases out of ten the tip was produced, and Hazzard would pocket it with a little ironic and grave smile. Probably no diner-out ever suspected him of irony, or of being what he was or what he would be.

II

It was Saturday, and Christopher had packed a bag that was black and rather shapeless, like a mother-bag that had produced many families. One of the white metal clips was missing. When lifted by the handle it sagged at either end; placed upon a flat surface it allowed itself to relax and to bulge.

Hazzard met Ruth Avery on the stairs. She had been running up them and was out of breath, and in standing aside to let her pass he was aware of her quick breathing and her colour. They had not spoken to each other since the incident of the roses and the marmalade pot.

She looked at his face and then at the black bag. Her eyes were shy.

"Going away?"

The question was as obvious as her smile, and yet her smile was not as obvious as it seemed. She was a dusky thing, far darker than he was, suggesting a damask rose or a purple pansy, quick to change colour, slim, sensitive. This smile of hers came and went as quickly as her colour, and when she was not smiling her face had a mute, apprehensive sadness. Always when in movement she would appear a little out of breath, or fluttering like a bird, her face suddenly aglow and as suddenly pale and serious.

Hazzard was as shy of her as she was of him, but it showed in him differently. He would just stare at a person with those still and watchful eyes of his and say nothing, or with a lift of the head utter a few curt, casual words. He had learnt how to protect himself with silence, or to use silence as a weapon, a menace that warned people off.

"Country—till Sunday night. Must get out of London sometimes."

She seemed to shrink against the handrail. He puzzled her.

"I wish I could. Regent's Park—is my limit."

"Might do worse."

He gave her a glance that was neither friendly nor hostile. It was steady and impartial; it offered nothing and it asked for nothing. He went on down the stairs, while she remained leaning against the rail, watching him descend, one hand laid along her cheek. She had the quick reactions of a sensitive child. Reserve, coldness, an unfriendly reticence hurt her.

Before leaving No. 7 Roper's Row Hazzard opened the glazed door that gave access from the passage to Mrs. Bunce's shop. Mrs. Bunce in a red shawl was checking the copies of an evening paper. She wore spectacles; she had an amorphous roundness of face and figure; hair and skin were so alike in their bleached deadness that they seemed to melt into each other. She was never without a shawl, even in the height of summer, though the colour of the shawl might vary.

Said Hazzard, "I shall be back to-morrow night, last train. You might leave the door unlocked."

Mrs. Bunce turned her spectacles upon him. She had one of those confidential whispering voices that go on and on like a perpetual draught through a keyhole.

"That's all right, dearie. Hope you'll find your mother well. It will do you good—it will—a whole day in the country. Drat that paper boy. He's short on me again with the *Globes*. I'll have to count 'em a second time—to be sure. Yes,—I'll leave the door un-

locked. You'll come up quiet, won't you? Old Rammell's so touchy about noises—after ten o'clock. I must count these papers over again. One, two, three——"

Hazzard left her counting, for in Roper's Row simple arithmetic was of more importance than reading or writing. Necessity sat at the master's desk and made you figure everything out without any help from a chalked example on the blackboard. If you had a supreme purpose planted like a pot of musk upon your window-sill, you cultivated a divine miserliness in order to cherish that one plant. You were suspicious of all other plants, especially that particular flower that had the face of woman.

Hazzard's eyes were on the green trees in Red Lion Square. He carried a whole philosophy in that deplorable black bag, but on this June day his limping walk had a little lilt of exultation. He did not see the London figures, those human cyphers, or the rolling cabs and the thundering vans. He was thinking of his mother, and of the things he had to tell her, and of the way her eyes would light up when she heard his news.

III

Christopher wrote to his mother once a week, but his week-ends at Melfont were far less frequent because of the cost of a third-class railway ticket. It had to be saved for penny by penny. It was as precious as the second-hand text-books that were bought in Charing Cross Road.

To Christopher that Wiltshire country had a strangeness, a mysterious austerity that somehow was associated with the memories of his solitary childhood, and memories of his mother, and of starlight nights and of blue days upon those upland fields and wild pastures. It was a country that was so open and yet so secret. Its skies seemed vaster than other skies, its valleys more green for contrast. Always it formed a kind of background to his consciousness, shepherd's country, open to the wind, with those green barrows and grey stones scattered about it. It had landscapes that suggested ghosts, dim figures standing at gaze upon green and lonely hill tops, the spirits of wild men looking down upon the shadows of cloud and of tree. It seemed to associate itself in Christopher's mind with the isolations of his own asceticism, with an apple eaten under a tree, or a glass of clear water, the clean floor of his mother's cottage, flowers in an old brown jug, red peonies or roses or dahlias, his mother's fresh white skin.

Directly he saw those rolling chalk hills he was conscious of a

difference in himself and in them. The steaming stewpan that was London was left to simmer under its smoky sky, while these great rolling spaces sunned themselves as they had sunned themselves in the days of the Barrow men. Silbury—Avebury—Stonehenge. And the silvery light, and the blueness before rain, and the fields of buttercups, and the great, glooming beech woods. It was all so old, yet so new. Ages ago men had watched the sun top the horizon, a red or a gold sun. In London there were no sunrises. A window blind grew grey and you got up.

Lying amid the grasses on those uplands as a child, and listening to the wind making a murmuring about some old sarsen stone, Christopher had seemed to feel those other men lying in the grass beside him. He had pictured them as smallish, wild, dark men, rather like himself. And why not? Was it not possible that he was of the same blood as those Barrow men who had gone free upon these uplands when the place that was London had been a swamp?

He, too, was one of those indefatigable little men pounding away with a stone, or pecking at the chalk with a reindeer pick, or toiling with those others to raise the great sarsens. He loved the spacious sky and the wind in his face, and the flowers of that sweet, short turf, and the river valleys with green lips dripping with moisture.

IV

Mary Hazzard wore her black silk dress and the gold brooch with the amethyst set in it.

She came down the path through the vegetable plot at the back of her cottage carrying a rush basket in which were two brown eggs. A yew tree threw a patch of shadow on the white wall beside the green door which when open showed the well-washed red bricks of the kitchen floor. On the dresser stood a yellow bowl half full of eggs, and Kit's mother added these other two to the hoard. For a week before one of Christopher's visits she would collect and save every egg that her hens laid so that he could take them back with him to London, together with a plum-cake, and a bunch of roses or sweet-scented stocks or purple and rose asters.

Passing through the cottage into what was both flower-garden and orchard, a little green place dabbling its hands in the river, she sat down in a Windsor chair under an apple tree to wait for the great occasion. Christopher's train reached Barrowbourne at three minutes past five. He had to walk the three miles from

Barrowbourne to Melfont, for the carrier's cart was as slow as a funeral, and you saved sixpence at the expense of shoe leather. The day of the motor was not yet.

Mary Hazzard loved these minutes of waiting, though the expectant tumult of them was inward. She was one of those silent, deliberate, tall women, with an air of passive dignity. She was black and white. Her dark eyes were steady and large. The lesser, fidgety, garrulous, crudely egotistical fry did not understand her silences or her reserves. Her heart was a dark flower, fragrant but hidden.

Always in summer she waited for her son in that patch of garden, with the river going by, and the light playing in the willows. In winter she had her chair by the window where she could watch the gate. A path led down from the lane over a slope of grass. There was a damson tree by the gate.

Suddenly she saw Christopher at the gate. It never ceased to be a thing of wonder to her that he should return out of that other world which she never knew into this little world that was hers. She rose from her chair, but remained standing under the apple tree. She had that dignity that is seen in some country women, but is very rare in cities.

"Well—Kit—my dear——"

Both their faces were alight. He came to her with something of the air of a child, for she was taller than he was. The man disappeared in the boy.

"I have some news for you."

He kissed her, and not as most sons kiss their mothers. His kiss was meant, and in kissing her he seemed to kiss the hills and the trees and that gently flowing water, the very mother earth of his world.

"You've never brought me bad news yet, my dear."

She had her hands on his shoulders. His grave face had ceased to be a London face, watchful, and shut up behind shutters of sensitiveness.

"It's the Angus Sandeman Prize. I've won it. Fifty pounds and a medal."

"Oh—my dear—that's grand."

"You'll have to come and see me take it, Mother, in the autumn on Bennet's Day."

"I'll come," said she. "And to think, Kit, that I have been to London only once in my life."

He looked down through the greenness towards the river.

"London and you—don't belong."

For he was thinking how old and shabby and wrinkled London looked, and how young his mother seemed with her clear eyes and her white skin. He knew that she was sixty-five years old, but her black and whiteness were like the black and whiteness of a stately house. To him she was unique.

Chapter Three

I

On one of the "scientific shelves" of Snape's bookshop in the Charing Cross Road Hazzard discovered a treasure—a second-hand copy of Schiller's *Bacteriology* priced at fifteen and sixpence. When new the book cost thirty shillings, and Hazzard, holding it in his hands, and looking faintly flushed, turned over the plates and pages.

A little Hebrew salesman edged towards him, for the Jew had known an enthusiast to smuggle a book out under his coat, and Hazzard's eyes were like the eyes of a man gazing upon his beloved.

"Latest edition, twelve new plates——"

Hazzard was considering ways and means.

"Fifteen and six."

"Cheap at that."

"Will you take twelve bob?"

"We're not in business to lose money."

Hazzard put the book down on the shelf, and felt for his purse. He knew just how much there was in that purse—a half-sovereign, two florins, two shillings and a threepenny bit. He could pay for Schiller's *Bacteriology*, but it would be at the expense of a week's semi-starvation; it would mean a diet of bread and margarine and water, but he had three of his mother's Wiltshire eggs left.

"I'll take it."

"Wrap it up for you, sir?"

"No, don't bother."

Hazzard walked out of the shop and up Charing Cross Road to Oxford Street. It was a hot day in July, and over that space where Oxford Street and Charing Cross Road and Tottenham Court Road and New Oxford Street meet industry had diffused a perfume of hot pickles. There were other perfumes that associated themselves in Hazzard's mind with London and heat and horses and flower-sellers and Italian restaurants. He smelt one of these appetizing perfumes in Tottenham Court Road, a breath of hot steak and onions, and to a young man who was almost always hungry such an aroma made a pungent appeal. His nostrils quiv-

ered, but under his arm he had that book, and in his pocket sixpence and a threepenny bit, and before him days of asceticism, and nights when he would get up and drink water in order to appease the wistful emptiness of his stomach.

Bennet's Hospital stood at the end of Bennet Street. A grey building powdered with soot, its ground plan the shape of an H, it displayed to people walking up Bennet Street a paved forecourt with high iron railings and double gates. A black and white clock high up in the pediment stared like the eye of a Cyclops. The rows of sash windows emphasized the Georgian symmetry of the building, and its greyness was the greyness of an English sky.

The hospital could be entered by students either through the main doorway where the porter's lodge projected into the forecourt, or by way of the college entrance in Groom Street, and these two methods of entry offered Hazzard a daily choice. The little, sensitive, shrinking boy in him felt tempted to sneak in by the college door, especially after the luncheon hour when house-surgeons and house-physicians, dressers, clinical clerks and students would mass themselves in the main corridor just inside the entrance, waiting for the great men to go round their wards. Hazzard had to compel himself to face that young crowd. It was a hostile crowd, ironical, irresponsible, cruel without realizing its cruelty. He would make himself face it. He would limp across the bare and empty forecourt, feeling very much alone in that grey space, and aware of all those waiting faces. He was conscious of being watched, and of forcing himself to advance against the pressure of an intangible hostility. A cold draught of unfriendliness seemed to blow upon him out of that doorway with its big glazed doors, persuading him to pull his rather threadbare pride across his chest as though covering himself on a bitter day with the collar of his coat.

For this London hospital was Melfont over again, with young men instead of children forming the conventional crowd. It expressed the hatred of the many for the unusual and the peculiar, the derisive and mocking hostility that is instant in its pillorying of enthusiasm, especially shabby enthusiasm. It exemplified that English middle-class mistrust of the artist, and of anything that does not express itself in action and in the physical language of games. It disliked that which puzzled it, and that which inspired a sense of discomfort, an irrational keenness that was bad form, an efficiency that was an offence. To most of these young men Hazzard was "The Squit," and Hazzard knew it. That doorway framed faces of derision.

With Schiller's *Bacteriology* under his arm he passed from the sunlight of the forecourt to the shadow of the vestibule. All the familiar faces were there, familiar but unfriendly. Young men lounged against the red walls of the corridor or stood in groups. As a rule they took no notice of Hazzard; no one spoke to him. Someone might say—"Hallo, here comes the 'Squit,' " and they would leave him to worm his way through the crowd towards the door of the cloak-room.

The faces of his fellow-students were blurred to him, perhaps because he did not wish to focus them clearly, but hastened to get through the crowd and away from it. Usually he would take refuge beside Julian Moorhouse, who stood a little apart against the wall beside the mahogany door of the Board Room, looking aloof and a little bored. Moorhouse was about the only man at Bennet's who treated Hazzard as a human being. Big and brown and fair, with old country stock and Winchester and Trinity behind him, he had not much in common with these rather raw young men who were so full of a cocksure physical complacency and to whom nothing was sacred, woman least of all. It is probable that Moorhouse despised most of them, and especially so for their despising of Hazzard. But to Christopher there were faces in the crowd that he both hated and feared: Bullard's brick-red jowl with its little fiery eyes, and its nose like the trunk of an elephant, Parker Steel's strenuous pallor and merciless green-grey eyes, and the goat-like and ironic head of Ardron, old Sir Dighton Fanshawe's house-physician.

Hazzard pushed through, but on this particular day someone grabbed his arm.

"What about that sub., my lad?"

He found himself looking into Bullard's eyes.

"You're the only fellow who hasn't paid up. What about it?"

That was Bullard's way. A debonair and flashy animal, with the gross vitality of him showing in his mutton-fat black hair and glowing skin, he set a standard. He captained the hospital football team, and was the Bennet's Club Secretary. He had haunches, and a mat of swarthy hair on his chest. A dominant young blackguard.

Hazzard, held by the arm, refused to flinch.

"I don't play games. You know that, Bullard."

"No reason why you shouldn't fork out half a guinea though. We're all Bennet's men. What's that?"

He tweaked the book from under Hazzard's arm, and holding it as a man holds an offensive and purulent dressing, made the occasion public.

"A Bug Book. If you can buy books and walk about with 'em. I say—you chaps—don't you agree——?"

Said Hazzard very quietly, "My book, please, Bullard."

There was a moment of tension. They were in the arena together with youth looking on. And then Bullard began to laugh. Christopher was wearing that big bowler hat that added to his grotesqueness in the eyes of the conventional, and with one heavy downward squelch of his footballer's hand Bullard crushed the hat over Hazzard's eyes.

"You squit."

Schiller's *Bacteriology*, sent whirling over men's heads, fell crumpled and with covers spread like a bird brought down, close to where Moorhouse was standing. And Moorhouse bent down and picked it up.

"Easy, you fellows."

For quite a number of enthusiasts were refusing to allow Hazzard to emerge from his crushed hat. Half a dozen hands were busy, thrusting it down over his eyebrows, and Moorhouse intervened in his big, deliberate, rather loose-limbed way.

"Easy,—time. Here's old Dighton coming."

Removing Christopher's hat for him he was aware of the stark humiliations of that sensitive face. Meanwhile Sir Dighton Fanshawe striding in, top-hatted and frock-coated, and looking like a self-conscious and sleek old eagle, found a suddenly decorous crowd and Ardron—the goat-like—waiting for him and very much his house-physician.

II

That was the tragic element in Hazzard's career, the dislike that he inspired, and the persecutions it produced.

He loved his work, and he loved his hospital—almost with that most pathetic love which is despised and flouted by the beloved. Life had the eyes of a beautiful and hostile woman. He asked for nothing but to be let alone, and to be allowed to exercise the passionate devotion of a little man with a big head and a genius for taking trouble. There was not a corner of "Bennet's" that was not precious and singular to him. He had loved the corner in the physiology lab. where he had sat in a patch of sunlight with his microscope before him, and his bottles of stains and box of slides and coverslips. Hæmatoxylin, fuchsin, methylene blue, they were more than mere colours. The smell of Canada Balsam was a precious perfume. Even the dissecting-room had had a bizarre homeliness, and those trussed-up or prone corpses a mystic signifi-

cance. He had had qualms, especially over the fishing of a leg or arm out of a locker that reeked of preserved flesh and alcohol.

He loved the wards and the out-patient departments, the smell of humanity and of sick humanity, and all that sense of striving and learning and disentangling, of things done and doing, the adventures into diagnosis, and all the problems of the greatest of the professions. There a something in him went out to the maimed and the halt and the blind, but especially did his heart go out to sick and crippled children. For he had been a crippled child; he knew what a lame foot or a diseased spine or a tuberculous hip-joint meant. If there was one post that he coveted and saw himself filling in the future, it was that of physician to the Children's Out-patient Department. A sick child moved him, stirred the bowels of his compassion.

Just that! But because of his very keenness and his genius, and because these virtues were displayed in an ugly and rather grotesque little body, he was disliked and actively disliked. Youth is apt to be both crude and cruel. These rather raw young men, who, in some quite marvellous way, would mellow and become general practitioners, and husbands and fathers, saw in Hazzard nothing but a little chopping-block, a swat, a horrid little sedulous ape. He was shabby. They doubted his physical cleanness, whereas he was cleaner than any of them. His hair grew in an unfortunate way. His black boots were very much boots. He always seemed to wear the same suit or the same sort of suit, cloth of a dingy blackness peppered with grey. He was not a social creature, and he was not allowed to be sociable. The telling of a dirty, sexual tale left his face blank. Life and his craft meant for him a patient asceticism which none of these full-blooded young males understood or troubled to understand.

Also, there are forms of persecution which, though passive, are as potent in discouraging enthusiasm as the more aggressive methods. To ignore may mean the depression and the discouragement of the person ignored.

When Ardron and his four clinical clerks set out to accompany and to follow Sir Dighton Fanshawe round his wards, Christopher was at the tail of the little procession, but on the day of the crushing of his hat, Moorhouse, who was one of the four clerks, hung back to keep Christopher company. Climbing the stone stairs side by side, with Moorhouse's long legs in sympathy with Hazzard's short ones, they suggested the big and the little dog. Moorhouse was all that Hazzard was not, slow of speech, comely in a man's way, with a sleepy, blue-eyed dignity that took life in its

stride. He came of old stock. He made you think of a field of wheat gold in the ear, oak trees, dogs, horses, a chair in the sun, the brown throat and arms of a cricketer at the wicket in the heat of a July day.

They said nothing to each other on the stairs. Moorhouse was not a man who said things. With his easy, deliberate poise he put himself in a certain position, and the picture needed no label.

Sir Dighton had paused to look at some specimens on the table between the glazed doors of the wards and the first red coverleted bed. He had made his little, debonair bow to the Sister. Two nurses stood like mutes. A ray of sunlight touched old Fanshawe's white head.

"Number seventeen's?"

Ardron, jerkily polite, held up the glass.

"Yes, sir."

Sir Dighton, doing everything with that air of distinction, and with a faint smile of profound sagacity, turned to his four clerks.

"Gentlemen, you see that urine."

He had a velvet touch. His voice and manner transmuted even the most indelicate substance into refined gold. It was his custom to address his clerks as "Gentlemen," and they too—in a sense—were transmuted from mere conglomerations of crude young tissues and secretions into something that many of them were not. Often he would address a favourite with an air of fatherly intimacy. "Moorhouse, will you listen to that heart." Moorhouse was Moorhouse to him. To Ardron he gave the Mr. because Ardron was a Mr. and nothing of the Esquire. When picking out one of the others he would indicate him with his eyes, and if the youth was to his liking, honour him by remembering his name.

"What do you see there, Moorhouse?"

Moorhouse hesitated and smiled.

"Urates, sir."

Old Dighton gave Moorhouse one of those tolerant and half-humorous glances which said, "My dear boy, take your time; think again," but Moorhouse remained serenely mute, though Hazzard who stood next him, felt moved to pinch his arm and to whisper, "Pus, Moorhouse, pus." One of the other clerks, Soames, had the beginnings of a simper on his soapy face. Milord Moorhouse might be the best-dressed and the best-looking fellow in the hospital, but he was a bit slow in his reactions and in the superficial smartness of the game of bedside ragging. You felt that you had shot your cuffs and scored a point when you wiped Moorhouse's stately eye.

Sir Dighton's glance travelled and fell on Hazzard. He did not address Hazzard, but looked at him challengingly.

"Urates, sir."

Sir Dighton glared faintly, and passed to Soames, and Soames the soapy concluded that if that little beast Hazzard had said "Urates," that cloud of sediment must consist of urates.

"Urates, sir."

Sir Dighton went no further.

"Pus, gentlemen, pus."

His glance rested for a moment on Hazzard as though there was some purulence in that small person. He spoke to Ardron.

"Your clerks ought to know that, Mr. Ardron."

Ardron, too, glanced at Christopher. Little Snob! Backing up Moorhouse. No. 17 was Hazzard's case, Ardron was sure of that, and Hazzard knew quite well what was in the test glass.

The progress continued. Leading the way, and followed by his house-physician and the Sister, his four clinical clerks, and sundry students who had gathered to listen to his words of wisdom, Sir Dighton Fanshawe went round the ward. He would pause at the foot of each bed, and combining the airs of the beau with the dignity of the sage, repeat the same question, "Well, how are we to-day?" He did not listen to the patient's answer. Time was precious and clinical facts are of more importance than feelings, and the case sheet and the temperature chart and his house-physician's report were the realities that mattered. If the ward happened to be a female one Sir Dighton was more of the beau; in a male ward he was the benign autocrat. When a case was new to him he would sit down on the edge of the bed, ask a few questions, and then call upon the clerk who was responsible.

"Whose case is this?"

"Mine, sir."

The first new case happened to be Soames's. It was that of a woman of forty or so, with very red lips and a patch of bright colour on either cheek, who lay propped against three pillows, and looked at Sir Dighton with anxious, cow-like eyes. The diagnosis was almost obvious to the experienced eye.

"Have you examined this case, Mr. Soames?"

"Not yet, sir. She was only admitted——"

"Very good. Begin."

Soames, who was apt to get flustered in spite of the soapiness of soul and skin, lugged at the stethoscope in his pocket, dropped it on the bed, and with his eyes invited the Sister to deal with the patient's night-dress. Sir Dighton put up a hand.

"Mr. Soames, too much hurry. Eyes, man, eyes. Observe, observe."

Soames, smirking faintly, stared at the woman, whose eyes were fixed like those of a sick animal on old Dighton.

"What do you observe, Mr. Soames?"

Soames was mute, and Sir Dighton turned to Hazzard, who happened to be next him.

"You?"

The word had a curtness, and there was a slight tremor of Hazzard's upper lip. But he had no compunction about putting Soames in his place, for Soames was not Moorhouse.

"The colour of the lips, sir; the redness of the cheeks; the position of the patient."

Old Dighton's eyes narrowed.

"Well, what would you be led to suspect?"

"Heart, sir, mitral disease."

Fanshawe gave Hazzard a nod of the head, and a glance of cold and curious dislike. Probably he was not conscious of the glance's temper. There was too much cleverness in this little fellow; like a monkey he was rather irrepressible.

"Never jump at conclusions, Mr. Hazzard. Distrust your inner consciousness."

Hazzard's lips moved as though he were about to answer, but old Dighton's face was turned again to the patient, and the snub spread like a smoke ring to be sensed by the other young men about the bed. Hazzard stood very still, with his eyes on the woman's face. She had a something that reminded him of his mother.

III

Ruth Avery's window confronted other windows, and above them a stucco cornice, slates and a variety of chimney-pots, but in the window immediately opposite hers a young couple had a bright green window-box full of scarlet geraniums, and muslin curtains with pink bands. That the colours were all very wrong was as obvious to Ruth as the clashing of most things in life, but then the sounds that came from lovers' windows could be intimate and disturbing. Lying in bed at night, or sitting at her open window wrapped in solitude behind a blue serge curtain, she would seem to feel the heart of Roper's Row surging in at her window. She was very solitary, but she was not made for solitude, with her quick colour and her dusky eyes; but then she suffered from a bird's wildness and timidity. And she was fastidious.

Roper's Row sang and shouted and gossiped. The geraniums in the window-box opposite fired red shots at her as she sat alone with herself. Sometimes she could feel the little red blurs on the dark target of her consciousness, yearnings, restlessnesses, wounds. There would be little scufflings and laughter between those two lovers in the room over the way. A merry fellow, who sometimes played the banjo in a house along the Row, would burst into sudden song. She heard him now.

"When you've been all day in the street
There's nothing to feel but feet,
Nothing to feel but feet.
When you've been all day in the street
You're standing on plates of meat."

Her eyelids flickered. She shuddered so easily at certain things, while understanding the inwardness of them. She knew what it was to have tired feet and an aching back. The office closed at one o'clock on Saturdays, and she—to amuse herself—had nothing to do but walk, up streets and down streets, round squares and into and out of parks. She walked because she felt pursued by restlessness, or to escape from the sense of her solitude in moving among other people.

The voice was singing another stanza.

"When you have got to the end of your life
There's nothing to do but die,
Nothing to do but die,
When you come to the end of your life,
There's nothing to do but die."

What a philosophy!—and she had no philosophy, but only her youth and a feeling that she was coming to the end of life even before she had begun to begin it. She was an orphan; she had no relatives left to her save an aunt in Devon, and two cousins whom she had never seen. She had no margin, no prospects, and no adventure in view save the woman's adventure with a man and a child. But she was shy of men; she was as shy of them as Christopher Hazzard was of women, but for different reasons. It was as though she divined the adventurous cad in the average man, his sex savagery, his tendernesses and pawings that were no more than an animal hunger that disappeared when it had gorged itself.

Men stared at her in the street. She was a comely thing, and she knew that a man would easily be come by, but there was that something in her that hung back. She was very sensitive to being stared at; she would flinch and hurry by with flickering eyelids, and a rush of blood to her cheeks. Once or twice in half-lit streets she had known panic and had fled.

Hurrying in on one of these occasions she had met Mrs. Bunce under the gas-jet in the passage.

"My, dearie, you do look flustered."

"Someone followed me."

"A gal has to get used to that, dearie. You learn to put a hard face on, and they'll let you alone."

Leaning out for a moment to look at life she saw Hazzard coming down Roper's Row from the direction of Red Lion Square. She watched him. She found a touch of appeal in his limping walk; he worked so very hard; he seemed as lonely as she was. Withdrawing she stood up, and then going to her door, opened it an inch or so, and listened. She heard the lub-dup of his footsteps on the stairs.

She felt herself flushing. She heard him coming up the last flight, and opening her door wide she went out on to the landing. His head appeared, crowned by the felt hat, which, in spite of ironings and coaxings, showed the scars of persecution. She pretended to be surprised, but the pretence was very innocent.

"Oh, it's you——"

He looked at her as he looked at all women, seeing in them strange, perilous creatures, forbidden to him by the celibacy of his unfailing purpose. He was the working ascetic. It is probable that—vaguely yet instinctively—he feared woman as he feared any hindrance or interference.

He said "Good evening" and turned towards his door.

Her eyelids flickered.

"I'm sorry. I expected someone about some typing. I thought——"

He had his hand on the door handle.

"I see."

"You haven't a book you could lend me, could you? I've nothing to read, and to-morrow's Sunday."

He looked surprised. He considered her a moment, and then went into his room, and scanned his bookshelf. He saw nothing but medical text-books. The only live book was the Bible his mother had given him.

He took it from the shelf and offered it to her.

"Nothing but this. After all—there are some good stories in it. You see—I haven't time."

With a queer little wincing smile she accepted Mary Hazzard's Bible, and leaving him rather like a child that has been told to go and sit down and be good, she returned to her room and closed the door.

She resumed her seat by the window, and let the book open on her knees. It opened at the Book of Ruth. She read:

"And Ruth said—'Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge——' "

At another window the gay fellow was singing his song:

"Nothing to do but die,
Nothing to do but die.
When you come to the end of your days
There's nothing to do but die."

Chapter Four

I

To the students at "Bennet's" Hazzard had appeared as one of those mysterious individuals who lack any of the appurtenances and the credentials of the normal male. He just appeared and disappeared. He had had his own reasons for not making friends, and his reasons had been an absurd pride and an equally absurd sensitiveness. He understood the laughter of fools. No one knew where or how he lived, and no one had cared, but with his increasing reputation as a little swat who was carrying off medals and prizes there were young fellow-my-lads who began to take notice.

The unusual and the abnormal may provoke dislike and ridicule, but when the unusual shows signs of singularity in the matter of success it may more seriously begin to offend. Men do not confess to such instigations, but the poison of them is there, and about this time Bullard and one or two more who were Bullard's suckers began to develop views upon the subject. Youth must have its mischief. Hazzard was to them the little Radical among the Tories, or the atheist in bishopdom, or the fellow who did not go to the inter-hospital rugger matches and shout. He was an outsider, a kind of parasite, a red tie, an offence, and becoming more actively so. He was the dog whose tail asked for the tin.

Bullard, wallowing in a chair in the college common room, and feeling restless and full of live blood, asked a question that was to be like a spark to tinder.

"I say, you chaps, I wonder where the 'Squit' lives?"

No one knew, no one had troubled to know, but here was a provocation.

"Bethnal Green," said someone.

"Billingsgate. Fishy little swine."

"I say, what a jest! Let's do a little Sherlock Holmesing. Soames, you'll be Watson."

"I'm damned if I will. I'm not such an ass as all that."

"Oh, aren't you! Well, anyway, let's play at Squit-hunting."

But to begin with they found Christopher strangely elusive. It was as though he had foreseen that some such game might be in-

vented, and just as at Melfont in the old days when he had had his secret ways of reaching home and had varied them in order to baffle those little persecutors who might lay in wait for him, so now he varied his homings to Roper's Row. Sometimes he struck into Oxford Street and followed it and New Oxford Street as far as Holborn, and then turned north. At other times he traced a kind of zigzag track through Bloomsbury. He doubled and diverged, and on the first two occasions when these bright lads set out to shadow him they found themselves following nothing.

"The little beggar's fly."

After two abortive attempts the others became bored, but not so Bullard. He was a persistent animal, the ruthless hunter of women and adventure, and on the third occasion he tracked Christopher to Roper's Row. He saw Hazzard enter No. 7.

"Got him."

Bullard went back to Bennet's and looking sly, laid a finger along that trunk-like nose. He was known to some of his familiars as the "Elephant," and the name suited him. But he kept the discovery to himself for the time being, and later in the evening he went off again, and finding the Bunce's shop still open, and Ophelia in charge of it, he took off his hat to her.

"Gentleman of the name of Hazzard live here?"

He had a way with women. He overpowered certain of them with his male perfume.

"Yes, top floor back."

"Righto, I'll go up, my dear."

"But 'e's out."

"Don't worry. I'm from the hospital."

He went up, and as it happened, Christopher, who had gone to the "Bunch of Grapes," had left his key in the door. Bullard explored. He opened Kit's sugar-box cupboards, and saw half a loaf of bread and some cheese, and uncovered the nakedness of the little room and thought it vastly funny. But on emerging he met a girl on the landing, and a damned pretty little bit of goods too—you fellows. He opened the furnace doors upon her.

"Excuse me, I was looking for Hazzard."

Ruth's wide eyes held him at gaze.

"He's not in."

"So I see.—Doesn't matter. Friend of his. You're not Mrs. Hazzard, are you?"

She looked shocked.

"Oh, no."

And he echoed her cry, laughing and glowing.

"Oh, no! I didn't think so—really. I didn't mean to be rude. You're not quite my idea."

And then Ruth had one of her panic moments in the presence of the male, and fled into her room and locked the door. Bullard rubbed his nose. Pretty little bit of goods—the sort that cried—"Oh, don't, please," and struggled. He descended the stairs, and finding Miss Bunce still in the shop, was gallant to her.

"I say, no need to tell him that anyone's called. He's such a nervous chap. Let it alone, my dear."

Ophelia was not such a fool as she looked.

"Friend of his, are you?"

"Quite so. He owes me something, but don't you worry him."

Miss Bunce nodded her tow-coloured head. Her view of the matter was that this red and black fellow had been up to see Miss Avery, and that Hazzard was the excuse. She had been listening at the foot of the stairs and had heard voices. So, Phelia, having a liking for Ruth Avery, said nothing to either of them, and Ruth herself saw no reason why she should speak to Christopher of Bullard's visit. As a matter of fact she did not see Christopher for the next three days. She heard his footsteps, and listened to them, and was vaguely troubled by them, for they came and went on the edge of her lonely life like the patter of a child's feet.

II

But from her window on a hot August evening, when the very walls of Roper's Row seemed to perspire, she saw Christopher, and a certain incident in which Christopher involved himself. There was a little hunch-backed child in the Row, the small son of a Cornish woman who kept a sweet shop, one of those children with a long, large head that looked too big for its stalk of a neck. The children of Roper's Row had made a victim of little Pengelly, and combined to persecute him until he flew into one of his funny and futile rages.

"Blub, Softie, blub——"

A truculent young round-head, rapping little Pengelly's face with his red knuckles, urged him from futile fury to tears, while the rest of the little mob gathered round and gloated.

" 'E's blubbin."

"Where's your mother, Softie?"

Into the group limped Christopher. He did not distribute cuffings or scoldings. He held the small bully by the shoulder, and said things, and the things that he said or his manner of saying

them appeared to sober the children. In face he was as white as little Pengelly, and when he took that small and hump-backed creature by the hand, and brought him in and up the stairs of No. 7, Ruth crept to her door and listened.

Said Christopher very gently to the child:

"Don't lose your temper with them. That's just what they want. Put a smile on, Kiddy. Just stand and smile at them, and thev'll let you alone."

"I know I'm ugly," whimpered the child.

"No, you're not. Besides, it's worse to be ugly inside. I've got a basket of plums in my room. I'll fill your cap."

She heard Hazzard take the boy into his room, and little Pengelly's voice asking questions. He was feeling comforted.

"You've got a fiddle."

"I have."

"My dad used to play the fiddle. He played beautiful, till his cough got too bad."

"Why don't you learn to play the fiddle? I suppose you have your father's violin."

"Oh, we had to sell that," said the boy. "I did hear mother say it helped to pay for his coffin."

III

It was Soames who shadowed Christopher through the shabby mysteries of the district lying between Clerkenwell and Islington, and made the discovery that Hazzard entered the side door of the "Bunch of Grapes." Soames was not impartial. Whenever he failed to answer one of Sir Dighton's questions in the wards Hazzard was able to answer it, and Soames was a little tired of Hazzard's infallibility. But Soames's researches were pushed beyond the pavement of St. John Street, and into the bar, and where, after being served with half a pint of beer, he heard sounds of music.

"Got a concert on, Miss?"

The barmaid was too busy to be conversational, and Soames was not an impressive young man.

"Yes. First door on the right, and straight down the passage."

Soames finished his beer, and exploring, saw through an open door and a haze of tobacco smoke, Mr. Bangs, Hazzard, and the flutist making music for the many.

Soames sailed back to "Bennet's," big with the news, and found Bullard and others playing poker in the college common room.

"I say, you chaps."

Soames was apt to froth at the mouth when he was excited. His soapiness blew bubbles.

"I bet you can't guess what the Squit does in the evening."

Someone suggested that Hazzard bathed with the urchins in the Trafalgar Square basins.

"Try again."

"Goes round with the Salvation Army? Can't you see the little blighter in a red jersey?"

Soames had to burst his bubble, and he burst it on Bullard.

"I s-saw him st-start out——"

"Don't spit, Samuel."

"Oh, shut up. The Squit goes to a pub in St. John Street, and plays the fiddle in a bally orchestra."

"No!"

"It's a fact."

"What sort of orchestra?"

"Oh, a boozer with a banjo, and a little monkey tootling on the flute, and the Squit fiddling. Funniest sight."

Bullard threw his cards on the table.

"By George, a straight flush! I say—you chaps—we'll make up a party and go and listen to the Squit fiddling."

That was what happened. Recruits were called up, and a party of thirty irresponsible young men started out for the "Bunch of Grapes." It was a rag, and the alumni of "Bennet's" had a reputation for ragging. Bullard was in command. In Tottenham Court Road they half cleared the barrow of an itinerant fruit-vendor, and went forward armed with bags of over-ripe plums. In St. John Street Bullard issued instructions.

"Look here, you chaps, we'd better drift in in twos and threes. If we blow in in a chunk the management'll get windy. We'll call it the Bag of Plums, what!"

Mr. Bangs was in the middle of one of his gags when the first instalment from "Bennet's" strolled into the big, bare room, each with a mug of beer in one hand and a brown-paper bag in the other. The room happened to be rather empty. Bullard and Soames sat down at one of the wooden tables, and with an air of concentrated solemnity placed their bags of plums on the board. They kept their hats on. Others arrived and sat.

Said Bullard—in the pause between Mr. Bangs's gag and the next piece of music:

"Why—surely—there's our dear little friend Squit. By George, what a small world it is. Good evening, Squit."

He raised an ironical hat to Hazzard. All of them raised their

hats. Mr. Bangs, scenting youth and mischief, beamed round upon them.

"Thank you, gentlemen. Will someone call a tune?"

Said Bullard, rising to his feet, and holding his mug:

"Sir, your good health. We are pious young men. I propose that the band plays 'Onward, Christian Soldiers.' "

There was a yell.

"Onward, Christian Soldiers——"

"Onward to the booze."

"With the buxom barmaid."

Christopher sat and looked at Bullard; he compelled himself to look at him. For he was under no illusions. He had been caught and he was to be pilloried. He was conscious of a little iciness in his spine, a dryness of the mouth, a sense of emptiness at the pit of his stomach. He just sat and looked at Bullard, and nursed his violin and refused to flinch. He knew that there was another door in the corner of the room, and that he might be able to bolt for it, but then the whole pack would be after him. Besides—he was not going to bolt. He would face it out.

Mr. Bangs stood up. His face looked shiny.

"Gen'lemen, this isn't a little Bethel. I looks towards you. We've got a little song—'Come where the Booze is cheaper.' "

Bullard led the roar of protest.

"No—no——"

"No vulgar ditties. We're pious fellows."

"Onward, Christian Soldiers——"

Mr. Bangs began an apology.

"Sorry—gentlemen—the hymn ain't in our repetoire. We can give you 'Annie Laurie' or ''Er golden hair was 'anging down 'er back.' "

There was uproar. One or two habitués began to hammer on the tables and to protest. Others laughed.

Said Bullard, standing, and with an air of elephantine gravity:

"Gentlemen, I put it to you that this band is a swindle. This band is an abandoned band. It cannot play a good godly tune, gentlemen. Gentlemen, I propose that this band be busted."

As Bullard had prophesied, the "Bunch of Grapes" became a Bag of Plums. The banjoist, raising his banjo to shield his face, received the first purple patch upon the ass skin. The flutist, picking up his chair, crouched behind the seat of it, and was moderately safe. Thirty young men, grabbing overripe fruit out of brown bags, and throwing it with gusts and squeals of laughter, plastered the violinist. It was no case for dignity. It was one of those occasions when an archangel would have looked foolish, and made

haste to retire behind his shield. The thing that had been Hazzard became a mess of juice and of pulped fruit.

The management appeared, an ex-pugilist in waistcoat and shirt-sleeves, backed by a couple of pot-men. Half a dozen rough customers, always ready for a row, especially when young toffs were the enemy, complicated the situation. Tempers began to be lost, and the throwing of things became impartial. Someone struck at Bullard, and was knocked into a welter of beer glasses and chairs.

IV

Ruth had been sitting up late, typing a short story that a shy young man had brought into Mrs. Bunce's shop. Her window was open, for the night was hot and oppressive, and between the trees of Red Lion Square and the trees of Gray's Inn, Roper's Row stretched like a narrow, stagnant, stuffy *vicolo* in Venice. Ruth was tired, and the shy young man's notions of literature were as shy as his blond head. Everybody else was in bed, and in the warm stillness of the night the clatter of the typewriter's keys and the ping of its bell were sounds that seemed enormous, threatening to keep the whole Row awake. People would complain. The Row complained easily and forcibly, and Ruth was expecting some voice to cry out in the stillness of the night, "Stop that damned clatter." She stopped it. She covered the machine with a piece of black cloth, and gathering up the sheets, put them away in a drawer. Turning the gas low, and raising the blind, she stood at the open window, for though she was tired she was tired to the point of restlessness, and she foresaw one of those nights when she would lie awake and think of all the worrying things that might happen, sickness—and the loss of her work, and starvings and ignominies.

Roper's Row was deserted. Not a footstep trickled through it, and in those days when life was quieter and the taxi had not ousted the hansom, London could sleep and be silent. The clap-clap of a horse's hoofs came and went in Lamb's Conduit Street. Someone opened a window, but such sounds were no more than the fall of an apple in the virginal stillness of the deep country. Ruth had the feeling that she was the only person awake in London, a little lonely watcher of stars and roofs and chimney-pots in a world that snored and was sunk in a terrifying indifference. For at times London at night did terrify her, especially in winter when rain was falling, or the street lamps seemed to be smothering in yellow fog.

She was about to let down the blind and shut out the dim windows opposite when she heard footsteps coming along Roper's Row. They associated themselves at once with the person of Christopher Hazzard. Lub-dup, lub-dup. Her heart quickened its rhythm. For, always, her loneliness was aware of that other loneliness across the landing, and reached out to it, and felt compassionate.

She heard his footsteps come to a pause outside No. 7, and the turning of a key in a lock. The door closed very gently. And then a sudden impulse moved her to open her own door, and to turn up the gas-jet on the landing. The last person to go to bed was responsible for turning out the gas, and usually that person was Hazzard.

She leaned over the banisters. He was coming up, and he did not know that she was there. He emerged slowly into the light, and she had her glimpse of him before he was aware of her presence. His hat had a gash in it; he was holding something under his arm, something that looked broken. His figure had a strange smeariness, a blotched, stained appearance.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Hazzard——"

He was startled, profoundly so. He stopped on the stairs with a quick, upward look of anger and impatience. His pride was a bruised pulp, but not too bruised to feel.

"I suppose so."

She realized that something strange had happened to him. She became a little breathless.

"I was awake—and I heard your steps. I thought the gas was out—and that you wouldn't be able to see."

He seemed to force himself up the last three steps, and she saw that he was carrying a broken violin. His coat suggested a wetness, patches of some sticky substance. His face looked so white and hard and brittle that she could imagine it cracking like china.

She had to say something. She was confused into saying something.

"You've broken your violin."

He looked at her almost with hatred.

"Some of my dear friends. What you call a rag."

"The beasts——! Oh—I'm so sorry."

And suddenly the hardness went out of his eyes. He stood and looked at her with a kind of wounded smile, rather like a child determined to be brave.

"You see—I'm an outsider. I don't live on my mother and father. I'm—I'm what you call an enthusiast. You get hated. Funny, isn't it? To be hated just because you are keen."

Her eyelids flickered.

"How beastly! Did they——?"

"Oh, it's just a game to them."

He looked exhausted, a little unsteady on his feet, and suddenly she put out a hand and touched his coat.

"What's that——? You're all——"

He laughed, though with the appearance of laughter no sound came.

"Plum juice. I've been pilloried. They pelted me. But damn them—they shan't stop me——"

She held out both hands. Her face was the face of Ruth.

"Do give me your coat. I'll sponge it. It will be dry in the morning. No—I'm not tired—and you are. And I don't feel sleepy. Yes, leave it with me."

He looked at her strangely with his still, deep eyes.

"Yes, I'm about finished—for to-night. But you——"

Her hands remained out, and putting down his broken violin, he took off his coat and let her have it.

"Thank you, Miss Avery. I don't know why——"

"Oh, I'd like to. One does sometimes. Good night."

But she turned in her doorway and saw him still looking at her.

"I'll hang the coat on the handle of your door."

"Thank you."

She went in with a queer little feeling of exultation, and hanging the coat on the back of a chair, poured out water into the bowl, and used her own face-sponge upon the stains.

Chapter Five

I

THE smashing of Hazzard's violin was one of those minor tragedies which can cause as much heartburn and contriving as do life's greater catastrophes. Moreover, his unfortunate felt hat, victim of many assaults, was fit for nothing but the dustbin, and the procuring of a new violin and of a new hat on one and the same moment propounded a problem.

Thanks to Ruth his coat was but little the worse, and he found it hanging on the handle of his door.

But there were other problems, and as he held the coat up to the light and examined it, his thoughts went to his mother and to a particular and cherished plan he had conceived. His mother was coming up to London for "Bennet's Day," when the hospital and its relations and friends gathered in the lecture theatre, and some great man delivered an oration, and prizes were presented. "Bennet's Day" was six weeks hence, and Christopher's plan necessitated the collecting of every possible penny. He had imagined it as one of life's great occasions, and on this August morning he was viewing it across the wreckage of a fiddle and a hat.

"Beasts!"

Yet, even in his bitterness he knew that he was not the victim of mere venom, but of childishness, of youth's proud flesh and turgid organs, of a young savagery that lusts to hunt and kill. Always he had hidden these persecutions from his mother, for he was not proud of being hated. The dog may be capable of despising the pursuing urchins, but he cannot help but feel ashamed of the tin tied to his tail.

The needs of the moment were another hat and another violin. He could not go hatless to the hospital, because his very hatlessness would be a cause of joy, nor could he afford to sacrifice the half-crowns at the "Bunch of Grapes." Getting out his stove and lighting it, he became the financier considering ways and means, and comparing the respective values of capital and income. He would have to pawn something, and he had only one article that was worth pawning, his particular treasure, a microscope that had cost him months of self-denial. It lived in a little mahogany case under his bed.

Over a breakfast of bread and margarine and tea he faced the situation. He knew that when his mother came to London she could not be kept from Roper's Row, and he did not intend her to see his room as it was, but as the son in him wished her to see it. In a sense—he was a devoted snob, not for his own sake but for hers. He had contemplated hiring some furniture and a carpet, and dressing up his back room so that it might appear more as a mother might wish to see it. Not that there was anything in Mary Hazzard that would quarrel with her son's room as it was, but Christopher, with those memories of her many devoted years behind him, had vanity of a sort, a sensitive child's scheming. He wanted his mother to have a memory to take back with her to Melfont, one of those mementoes that women treasure, especially when they speak with other women at their gates.

He supposed that the microscope would have to go into temporary retirement, and that he would be able to raise three or four pounds on it, and recover the instrument when he received a cheque for the Angus Sandeman Prize. He knew of a pawnbroker's shop in Holborn that had assisted him through other crises, and when he had washed up his breakfast things, he extracted the mahogany case from under the bed. He would raise his money, buy a new hat, and arrive at the hospital as usual. But when he thought of "Bennet's" and the humiliations of the previous night he was conscious of qualms. He knew that he would have to brave the Bullard crowd, and that the face of "Bennet's" would be large with laughter.

On that August morning the doors of Ruth and Christopher opened simultaneously. The microscope cabinet was matched by the cheap little attaché-case she carried, but whereas she had no reason to conceal her case, Hazzard had proposed to sneak forth without publicity.

He said, "You're early."

She had come out to meet him with a smile, counting upon friendliness after those ministrations to his coat, but he hung back and waited for her to go down the stairs. Her smile died away.

"Yes, I'm a little early."

She took to the stairs, and Hazzard, after a moment's hesitation, followed her. She had seen the microscope cabinet, but there was no need for him to assume that she knew that he was bound for the sign of the Three Golden Balls.

"Thank you for cleaning my coat."

Her smile returned, but he was not aware of it because he was behind her.

"Oh, that's nothing. I hope it's dry?"

"Quite."

From the shop came sounds of activity, the thuddings of bundles of papers, and the voices of Mrs. Bunce and her daughter checking the morning's stock.

"Two dozen *Daily G.s.*"

"Two dozen *Daily G.s.*"

"Fifty *Telegraphs*."

"I 'aven't counted 'em yet. Hold on a moment. Drat it, if I didn't forget to order those bottles of gum."

Ruth opened the street door. The passage was very badly lit, and the sudden change of light was like the withdrawing of a veil from a face that resembled the face of a flower. She glanced round at Hazzard with a little, amused glimmer of the eyes.

"I hear that every morning. Do you?"

"Those voices?"

"Yes. It always makes me think of people saying their prayers."

But he did not respond. His sense of humour—such as it was—hung in abeyance. Possibly he had a sense of life's grotesqueness, and failed—because of his own concentrated gravity—to appreciate the comic. Also, he was wondering which way she was going, and how he could manage to escape. He was most absurdly conscious of being without a hat. His self-consciousness made the little problems of life so much more vexatious.

He said, "I am just going down to Holborn."

Her response was instant and sanguine.

"So am I. I walk down Holborn and Newgate and Cheapside. Unless—it rains—pours——"

He closed the door. He was aware of her glancing at the mahogany cabinet. He romanced.

"My microscope. Taking it to an optician's. Something's wrong with the condenser."

She said, "Oh," and neither caring nor knowing about condensers, or the subtleties of oil immersion, waited with a little air of expectancy for him to place himself at her side. Her animation made other men look at her. She was wearing a red hat and a black blouse and skirt, and the red hat seemed to give a glow to her pale face. She had one of those pearly skins with a soft tinge of brown in it. She was a pretty creature, a woman unaccountably interested in a man who was of no interest to most women. She moved beside Hazzard with a face of expectancy. Other men looked at her.

Hazzard did not look. It was not that he was afraid to look. Other realities absorbed him. In a sense he was sex blind, a little celibate with eyes that saw nothing in woman save a creature anatomically different from man. Almost he had the mentality of a child where woman was concerned, that—and the attitude of the priest. It was part of a doctor's profession to minister to women, and woman had her own problems which became the problems of the accoucheur and the physician. Woman, as a piece of human symbolism, had remained for him the mother creature, and at that very moment he was thinking of his mother.

For to Hazzard his mother remained the tall, dark woman standing at the cottage gate and watching him set off down the lane for Melfont school. He still was supported by their mutual pride, their common aloofness. She was the figure to whom he returned, carrying his persecutings and his shames into the shadow of her wise and silent compassion, made brave by her bravery, stiffening his lip at the thought of her. She was his Dea Matrix, a figure of beautiful and reassuring permanency, courageous, beneficent, serene, like some primeval figure watching him from the shadow of one of those old Wiltshire sarsen stones. How deeply she inspired him he both knew and did not know. For to many a man such a woman is his secret self, challenging more than the mere sex in him, animating those sublimations of his manhood, the creative urge, the passion to accomplish, the courage to advance in the face of prejudice.

And he was thinking, "She must never know about Bullard and those fellows."

Meanwhile he was walking down Red Lion Street with Ruth Avery, who was puzzling herself over the aggressive cock of his head, and his dour, self-absorbed silence. Her eyes threw little oblique glances. His face gave her the impression of combat.

She said, "I'm going for my holiday next month. A whole week."

Hazzard came out of his combative stare. Holidays? He took no holidays, save those occasional week-ends with his mother.

"Where are you going?"

"I don't quite know yet. When's your holiday?"

He appeared to be looking intently at a yellow van that was crawling down the street. He avoided a stout woman with a basket, limping down into the gutter and back again to the pavement.

"When are you going?"

She flushed faintly.

"The last week in September."

"You'll be leaving your room empty?"

"Why—yes."

He was smiling, but not at her.

"That might be useful. Would you mind my having your room for the week? My mother is coming up from the country."

He was not aware of her face closing up like one of those sensitive flowers that fold their petals when touched or when the sun ceases to shine.

"Your mother——? Oh, of course not. I dare say Mrs. Bunce would let you."

They had reached Holborn. He paused on the edge of the pavement and looked at her with impartial friendliness.

"It's very good of you. I'm going this way—now."

Her smile puzzled him a little. She had the air of an impulsive child who has been rebuffed, and who smiles to cover up the confusion of a little innocent and secret shame.

"I hope they will soon put your microscope right."

"Oh, easily. Good-bye."

II

Man, being by nature a lazy creature, is provoked by the industry of the indefatigable few, and Moorhouse, who like most English youngsters worked hard at playing, was yet able to understand Hazzard and Hazzard's devotion. It was just a question of being interested. At a time when most young men were thinking of their batting averages, or whether they would get a place in the Rugger team, or of some particular petticoat that showed signs of consent, Hazzard was thinking of his scalpel or his stethoscope. Work was his play. That lame foot of his, and a particular temperament, and the attentive dark eyes of Mary Hazzard, had conspired to make him what he was.

Moreover, Moorhouse was a gentleman. He did most things so very well that he was apt to think less of the doing of them than the louts who have to scuffle and argue. Life came to him easily. There was no need in his case for crude self-assertion. The simile of the big dog applied. Also, being a little slow and deliberate in his reactions, one of those infinitely good-tempered Olympians who are never in a hurry, he saved time and tissue, and had his very handsome head well above the crowd's pushings and flurries.

He gave the appearance of slowness, but his was a fallacious slowness, being in reality deliberation, like the easy poise and movements of an athlete. He had what the players of ball games would call the power of anticipation.

Moorhouse first heard of the "Bunch of Grapes" affair from Soames, who was spluttering forth the epic event to certain fellows who came from the suburbs. Soames had a black eye. He was leaning against the railings of the college, and he was obviously proud of his black eye.

Moorhouse, joining the group, understood the significance of Soames's splutterings. Contusions were badges of honour; they had been liberally distributed; Bullard—it appeared—had a beauty.

"Some rag—I can tell you. They fetched the Bobbies in. But you should have seen the Squit. Someone trod on his old fiddle."

Moorhouse was in position. Having appreciated Soames's soaring snobbery, and gathered the facts, he commented on them with a frankness that was both simple and casual.

"You're a lot of cads."

Soames flared up.

"Oh, are we! Supposing you tell Bullard——"

"With pleasure——"

For Bullard, big with bacon and eggs, appeared upon the steps of the college, his right eye a blue-black bulge.

"I say, Bully, Moorhouse has something to tell you."

Moorhouse had. He stood there with his hands in his trouser pockets, a slight smile on his face.

"Oh, Bullard, I was just telling Soames that you are a lot of cads. That's my view."

Bullard laughed.

"Righto. You're such a damned superior person. Supposing we leave it at that."

III

Christopher, with three pounds ten shillings in his pocket, hesitated before an outfitter's shop window. The hour was twenty minutes to nine, and he was due to attend a lecture on Pathology at nine, and his need was a new hat.

In this Holborn window he saw top-hats and bowler hats and Trilby hats priced at various figures, and also a cap or two. The caps were of a red and white or black and white check pattern and suggested "horsiness." But they suggested to Christopher other

considerations, possible economies and an insurance against horse-play.

He entered the shop and inquired for caps. A young man who had the appearance of having slept badly, gave Christopher a moment's sleepy consideration before pulling out a drawer and displaying a multitude of caps of the chessboard pattern.

"Nice style, sir."

"I'd prefer something quieter."

The shopman closed the drawer and opened another in which were caps of various shades of depressed greyness. Each had a grey button on the crown. They were headgear of an inferior order.

"How do you fancy these, sir?"

Hazzard tried on one, and it sat on his big head rather like a muffin.

"Something larger."

"What sized hat, sir?"

"Seven and a half."

The shopman rummaged among the caps, and finding one of sufficient largeness offered it to Hazzard.

"There is a mirror behind you, sir."

Hazzard, having pulled the peak well down and felt that the thing covered his obstreperous hair, shirked the mirror.

"This fits. How much?"

"Two and elevenpence, sir."

"I'll take it."

But in turning to walk out of the shop he saw himself reflected in the mirror, and that grey cap pulled down tightly over an excrescence that was known in those days as a tuft. He looked like a schoolboy. He was aware of the insignificance of his own reflection, of its grotesqueness. The outfitter's mirror was like the face of "Bennet's," throwing back at him an ironical grin.

He walked out of the shop the victim of a sudden, horrible self-consciousness. He felt a sinking of the stomach, and all because of an absurd cloth cap. But the cap was symbolical. It was the lid of his unfortunate physical fate, or a kind of grotesque button perched upon the pate of his destiny. It provoked memories, and a particular memory of a grey, soft hat that his mother had bought him in Salisbury, and had, with a misdirected tenderness, sent him wearing it to Melfont Sunday school. That hat had ended the Sabbath with contumely and tears in the waters of the Wiltshire Avon.

Hazzard found himself walking up Holborn in the direction of New Oxford Street. His legs were taking him towards "Bennet's,"

and an ordeal that suddenly enlarged itself, and took to itself the faces of Bullard and of Soames. He knew that half the hospital would be agog. Even the nurses would have heard of that magnificent rag, of that adventure purpled with plums. Sometimes he had met half a dozen of these young women walking arm in arm along a corridor, full of suppressed laughter and feminine whisperings, and always he had felt that to them he was not quite a man. His soul burned. He walked on, but more slowly. Again he was the sensitive, shrinking child, inwardly afraid, shaking at the knees, dreading loud voices and the little savage shouts. "There he is! There's Dotty!" He burned. The humiliations and persecutions of years seemed to descend upon him in the London sunlight. The morning was all glare. He became a creature of sudden, pitiable childishness.

Almost he was moved to utter that old, instinctive cry, "Mother, mother!"

But only once or twice in his life had Christopher suffered that cry to escape from his lips. Even as a child he had divined its cowardice, its power to hurt and to wound the one creature to whom his little legs had carried him. Often he had raced home, white and breathless but silent, small hands clenched, that wailing cry bitten through and smothered.

On the broad pavement at the end of Tottenham Court Road a flower-seller sat behind her basket of flowers, and Hazzard's courage carried him just as far as the basket of flowers. Anger and bitterness and the hatred that reacts to hate will carry a man far, and a part of his inspiration is the confounding of his enemies. Hazzard could hate, but on this morning the force of his hatred failed him. He felt so utterly alone, so weak, so obscure.

IV

Moorhouse looked for Hazzard in the lecture theatre, but the little man did not appear.

At ten o'clock dressers and clinical clerks went to their wards for the morning's case-taking and dressing, but Hazzard was absent, and Moorhouse observed Soames and another student sharing some joke together. Ardron—Sir Dighton's house-physician—who disliked Hazzard, and made the most of his small authority, questioned Soames.

"Where's Hazzard?"

Soames smiled his soapy smile. He was feeling rather a devil of a fellow with that black eye.

"In bed, I should think. Caught cold last night."

"There are two new cases in his beds. You had better clerk them, Soames."

"What, both?"

"Well, Haines can take one, and you the other. Hazzard ought to have reported to me."

Moorhouse, who was examining one of his case-sheets, laid it down on the bed, and crossed over to Ardron.

"I am going off at eleven, Ardron."

"There's a new case of yours in the corner."

"I shall get it done."

"All right."

Moorhouse was not the sort of man whom Ardron could hector.

Moorhouse knew Christopher's address. The mystery had ceased to be a mystery, and the whole hospital was aware that Hazzard lived in a top-floor back room in Roper's Row, and that his bedroom was also his larder. Bullard had uncovered all those nice little nudities. And Moorhouse was full of scorn of the scorners, because he was more than a mere student of medicine, and had other traditions and other friendships.

He made for Roper's Row. He himself had rooms in Bernard Street in a house with a blue front door and very white window sashes, and Bernard Street and Roper's Row were not a quarter of a mile apart. At No. 7, Miss Bunce, reading a novelette behind the counter, beheld the golden man of her dreams enter her mother's shop. Moorhouse had beauty. He was more than a good-looking fellow; he had that something which women are quick to discover.

"Does Mr. Hazzard live here?"

"Yes, top floor back."

"Is he in?"

Ophelia did not know. She supposed that Mr. Hazzard ought to be at the hospital, but if the gentleman cared to go up and see? Or should she go for him? Moorhouse thanked her, and told her not to trouble, and she opened the door leading into the passage.

"You can get through this way."

Moorhouse climbed the dark stairs. He made so little noise that Christopher, who was sitting at his table with his head in his hands, did not hear his footsteps. For Hazzard was very deep in the savage misery of the moment, and in the humiliation of a surrender. He had allowed himself to flinch, and to be frightened by those hostile faces, and he was hating himself and them.

Moorhouse knocked.

"Who's that?"

Hazzard's voice had a suddenness. Almost it suggested the snarl of a dog suspecting an attack. He had turned sharply in his chair.

"It's Moorhouse."

"Moorhouse——!"

"Yes, I came along to see if you were seedy."

There was silence. Hazzard, sitting twisted, and clutching the back of the chair with both hands, stared at the door.

"I'm all right, thanks."

"That's good. I wondered. Can I come in?"

Hazzard stood up. His face had a strange ravaged look. He seemed to hesitate. Then, with a jerky stiffness he crossed the room and unlocked the door.

"Come in, Moorhouse."

He met Moorhouse's eyes for a moment, and then avoided them, not because there was anything in Moorhouse's eyes that could humiliate him, but because of their quiet, lazy kindness.

He closed the door. He was voiceless. He was acutely conscious of the poverty of his room, and of Moorhouse's well-cut clothes and of their many contrasts. One of his chairs was occupied by the broken violin. And the bed was unmade, and he had been in too great a hurry to wash up and clear away his breakfast things. Also, he had had neither the heart nor the will power to tackle the day's trifles.

"Afraid I'm in rather a mess. There's a chair."

Moorhouse sat down on the chair that Christopher had been using. He saw things without appearing to see them, the broken violin, the unmade bed, the teapot and cup and plate. He was moved to a young man's pity, but he concealed it with the tact of an older man. He brought out a pipe.

"Mind if I smoke?"

Hazzard's eyelids flickered.

"Do. Afraid I haven't any tobacco."

"I carry my own tobacco."

Moorhouse, who like Hazzard had a mother whom he loved very dearly, and sisters, and a country home where dogs and horses and trees and the very grasses were part of life, had that delicacy that is born of a happy childhood. He carried with him the indelible stigmata left by the touches of a woman. To him the atmosphere of home meant a place full of flowers and pictures, and green vistas, and old furniture, and the making of music. He was entering upon life—man's life—with that most blessed of heritages, happy memories, and faith in people.

He lit his pipe.

"Nothing much doing in the wards this morning. That case of myxœdema I have in the corner is behaving like a miracle."

He talked "shop" to Christopher and he talked it easily because in his way he was almost as interested in his work as Hazzard was. His keenness had not Christopher's sharp edge, but it was tempered with a young humanity. Moorhouse had very definite urges. And his easiness communicated itself to Hazzard, who, sitting on the edge of his unmade bed, and feeling raw, and ready to be hurt, became strangely soothed by Moorhouse's voice and manner. He admired Moorhouse, and he admired him ungrudgingly. He quite understood why Sir Dighton Fanshawe looked and spoke to Moorhouse as he did. There was something very big and lovable and wholesome about the man.

Meanwhile the broken violin lay there, and Hazzard knew that Moorhouse knew of the affair of the "Bunch of Grapes." He had known it instantly; he had divined in Moorhouse a quiet magnanimity. Nothing was mentioned. The very silence became a nexus of sympathy.

Said Moorhouse: "I say, come round and have some lunch with me. My people in Bernard Street can always raise a meal."

And Hazzard blushed.

"I'd like to."

"Good business."

V

To Christopher there came a sudden righting of his dignity. It seemed to him quite natural he should say certain things to Moorhouse, and do certain things in his presence, quietly and without shame.

"Do you mind if I tidy up?"

"Go ahead."

Moorhouse sat at the open window and smoked and observed this London vista, while Christopher made his bed, and emptied his basin, and washed and put away the breakfast crockery. Mostly there was silence between them, but here and there a few words were dropped with a tentative yet significant curtness.

"That poplar tree over there is rather unexpected."

"Yes, there's a tree just like it close to where my mother lives in Wiltshire."

"Which part?"

"Melfont. On the Avon."

"Great country. We are Gloucestershire. This ought to be a good window to read at."

Hazzard was poking the broken violin away under the chest of drawers.

"My mother used to keep a shop. She's a wonderful woman. I have to rough it a bit, but then—a man doesn't mind—when someone——"

"Of course not. My mater's a great woman. I say, Hazzard, why don't you take up coaching?"

"Coaching?"

"Yes, with your brains. It ought to be easy for you to get half a dozen duffers to cram. You might even begin on me."

"You're not a duffer," said Christopher sharply.

"No, but I'm damned lazy. Think it over——"

When Hazzard's household activities were over he took down the new cloth cap from the peg behind the door, and glanced at Moorhouse's bowler that sleeked itself in the sunlight on the table by the window.

"I'm ready now."

"Come along."

VI

Moorhouse's rooms in Bernard Street offered Kit many contrasts, but he was neither offended nor disconcerted by them. These natural objects were for the use of Moorhouse, and to Moorhouse Hazzard was ready to allow all the good things that he himself lacked. For in Moorhouse's room there was furniture of another sort, courtesy, a sensitive consideration.

And then arrived the hour when it was time to stroll to "Bennet's" for the afternoon's work.

"Excuse me a moment, Hazzard."

Moorhouse disappeared into his bedroom, to return wearing a cap, a cap that was much more distinguished than Christopher's, but still—it was a cap.

Bullard's crowd, very much on the alert behind the hospital doors, and offering and accepting bets on the chances of the Squit funking a public occasion, saw Moorhouse and Hazzard crossing the forecourt. Hazzard was wearing a cap. But so was Moorhouse. A conspiracy of comradeship, wearing the same headgear, challenged and confounded that petty situation.

Chapter Six

I

THERE were evenings when Mary Hazzard locked her cottage door, and following the path or sheep-track that left the lane where a spring emptied itself into a stone trough, she would climb Sisbury Hill. Time was when she had mounted the turf slope like a girl, without a pause, and almost without the hurrying of her breath, but those days were long ago. Now she would pause three or four times during the ascent, and stand and gaze above the valley where all her life had been passed—day in—day out—like the river itself flowing past the poplars, the willows and the orchards. The scene had a beautiful sameness. She could look at things that were near and at things that were far. She could tell where there had been the yellowness of buttercups, or the young gold of the Lombardy poplars in the spring, or the lushing up of the grasses, and the fleckings of colour—the flowers in the cottage gardens. She did not hasten, for life was growing short. Reaching the green crown of Sisbury where the wind came swiftly out of the west, and the sky had a clouded spaciousness, she would take her stand by the solitary stone set upright in the turf.

She called it Kit's stone. For it had been a favourite haunt of Christopher's where he could lie in the grass with a book, solitary and secure, like a hill-man able to look down upon possible enemies. Often and often from the western window of her cottage she had watched that little lone figure ascending or descending the great green hill. It was a heritage still sacred to the solitary and the few, and to those uncommon people who do not mix with the crowd, and who escape instinctively to a wood or a hill-top.

Usually it was about the hour of sunset when Mary Hazzard climbed Sisbury. With the setting sun behind her, if the evening happened to be clear, and with the menhir throwing a long shadow, she would lean against the stone and look towards the east. That is to say, she looked towards London and her son. Standing on that high hill she had a feeling that distance was obliterated, and that she was with Christopher and he with her.

For she was a woman of one love and no illusions. In her long and rather solitary life she had become rather like a mirror in

which life and its affairs were reflected just as they were. She reflected both mystery and make-believe, for the things as they are are only the things as we see them, and most of man's struttings are against a surface that is cracked and joggled. Ever as a tall, dark, grave-eyed girl Mary Hazzard had accepted solitude, finding that which seemed to be herself reflected in it.

But on Sisbury Hill she pondered other matters while feeling conscious of the yonderness of her son. To begin with there was the strangeness of growing old, while Sisbury Hill and Kit's Stone and the Avon and the beech woods across the valley remained strangely the same. And you yourself were the same, yet different. You were girl and mother, child and old woman. Finding nature so changeless and eternally renewed, you were surprised at your own wrinkles and your faltering heart, for your window of the senses seemed the same window. Also there were days when you felt like a child of seven or a girl of seventeen, and your years were sixty. Or you warmed your hands at the fire and wondered at death.

Yet there comes that season of acceptance, and it had come to Kit's mother. She had her secret, even as he had his. She knew that she had not very long to live, and yet she would climb slowly to the top of Sisbury because Sisbury was her hill of acceptance, a high place from which she could look upon what had been and what was and what might be. She had been spared that phase of old age in which life is nothing but a stream of irritations, of frettings against the failings of the flesh, of anger against all change —because change is youth. She had never been an irritable woman.

So, the last phase was to her like Sisbury. She liked it sun-steeped, with a soft breeze blowing, but when two days out of three were grey and green and sad she accepted them, for life is like that, especially in northern lands. Little bursts of sunlight breaking through the wet, green, clouded sadness, and playing for a moment, and disappearing. She had done what she could, and now she was an old woman on a hill-top watching youth in the valley.

Yet, she knew her son as she knew the valley.

Almost she could follow his path in its past and in its future.

He had had so many obstacles to surmount, and with that lame leg of his.

She had watched him climbing.

She knew that she wanted to go on living until it was known in this Wiltshire valley that her son had done that which he had set out to do.

Dr. Christopher Hazzard.

But after that——? There was always an afterwards, even perhaps when you died. She had Christopher's afterwards very much before her, for on Sisbury she was like a woman who was fey, and the afterwards—as she saw it for her son—filled her with peculiar compassion. Always he would be very much alone, for he was flesh of her flesh, and spirit of her spirit. He would have the world more against him than with him, for the world was but Melfont village enlarged. His passion was work, and the world is prejudiced against the aloof and passionate worker.

He would have such struggles, and no longer would she be a live presence in his life, and yet in a strange way she was glad.

She was one of those women who foresaw old age and decrepitude as a burden to others, a burden that might tenderly be borne, but which remained a burden. She would leave her son a hundred odd pounds and that little old cottage, and a memory.

Moreover she saw in Kit more than a mere country practitioner, a little, kindly, pottering, conventional creature going a daily round. She saw him as the searcher and the creator, and a searcher is not made for the bearing of burdens. She saw him very much alone, absorbed, gazing intently at the infinite significance of the very little, using those clever hands of his. She believed—somehow—that her son would be a great man, but she doubted whether he would be a very happy one.

But what was happiness, especially to a man? Surely it lay in striving, searching, and accomplishing?

II

A quarter of a mile up the lane lay Prosser's Farm. It was marked on the estate maps as "Beech Farm," but it had come to be known as Prosser's Farm because it was so full of Prosser; and the Prossers were pushing people. Mrs. Prosser had had a family of eleven, and all doing well—thank you, and Prosserish, as was to be expected. Their ages ranged from four-and-twenty to eight, and the first three Prossers, red, blue-eyed and truculent, had been the most merciless of Christopher's persecutors.

Mrs. Prosser, large and pink and fat, with a snout, and a general air of infallibility and good-humoured insolence, would waddle past Mary Hazzard's cottage most days of the week, and as a rule with a few small Prossers grunting and galloping near her like young porkers following the sow. She was a woman who sagged and bulged and quaked. She perspired, and seemed to enjoy it.

She had a loud voice and used it generously, on her husband and her children and her neighbours. An open gate tempted her just as it tempted her animal prototype.

If the young Prossers had persecuted the son, Mrs. Prosser had been equally molestive to the mother.

"Well, Mary, how's that boy of yours? I must say I'm sorry for a woman that has a child that's sickly."

Mrs. Prosser, leaning over a gate or filling a doorway, showed neighbourliness. She disliked Mary Hazzard, and the dislike was mutual, for it was common knowledge that Sam Prosser at the age of five-and-twenty had very much wanted Mary.

Sarah Prosser had not forgotten the romance, and all through the years she had—as it were—thrown a dish-clout at that tall, dark, silent woman. Also, she had thrown her children at Mary Hazzard, and her children's healthiness, and their looks, and their vigour, and the oozing, prodigal and happy fecundity of her own fat person. What Prosser thought of it was another matter.

During these later years Mrs. Sarah had changed her chant.

"Well, Mary, is that boy of yours a doctor yet? It does seem a long business, don't it? But—I do suppose it will be all right in the end—if his health holds out. London be such a—terrible—place, and he always was sickly."

If Mary Hazzard had any original sin left in her, it was provoked by the Prosser woman. She wanted to see her life's purpose planted securely and triumphantly above the wallowings of her neighbour. She asked to be spared the ordeal of being made to appear a fool before fools.

And Christopher had won the Angus Sandeman Prize, and she was going up to London to see him take it, and Mrs. Prosser knew. Sisbury Hill had the light of a smile on its green, still face.

III

Ruth was packing a portmanteau, a diminutive and very old brown leather contraption with two new straps and four of its corners patched. She had it open on the floor. She sat or knelt upon the floor like a child playing a game, for packing for your one yearly holiday was part of the adventure. Ruth was a little flushed. She was a creature of quick and graceful gestures, and of pretty poses that were unconscious, and of moments of still, dark thought. She could sprawl like a child, and be as natural and as graceful as a child when no one was watching her. Translated into the nude, and with the portmanteau transformed into a little

brown forest pool, she could have given to an artist the study of a naiad looking at her dusky self in the brown water.

She patted and smoothed a dress, or tucked a roll of stockings into a corner, or rose and turned on her knees to reach for some article from the bed. At eight o'clock next morning a good fellow who sold evening papers in Bloomsbury was to call at No. 7 Roper's Row and shoulder Ruth's portmanteau to Charing Cross Station.

But her absorption in the business of packing was not complete, nor was the prospect of ten days at Hastings so satisfying as it might have been. She was going alone to a bed-sitting room in Prospect Place, a girl friend in the office of Hilton & Stagg in Fenchurch Street having failed her. Also, it was the end of September and cloudy and rather cold, and romantic possibilities seemed absent.

She was about to close the lid of the portmanteau when she heard the opening of Hazzard's door, and his footsteps crossing the landing. She remained motionless, the feminine creature crouching and expectant, for since the incident of her washing of Hazzard's coat there had been a friendliness between them. Not that a girl of Ruth's eyes and colouring was content with friendliness; she wasn't; in her shy and secret way she had watched and wondered and listened, and looked for sweet significances in life's little nothings.

Moreover, during the last day or two Christopher's room had been full of activities. Men in dirty white aprons had carried things up the stairs, and she had heard Hazzard hammering and pulling furniture about. His mother was coming up from Wiltshire for Bennet's Day, and Ruth, too gentle and too unpossessive to be jealous, had caught herself wishing that the occasion could have arranged itself otherwise.

Hazzard's footsteps approached her door and paused there. He knocked.

"Miss Avery."

She rose on her slim legs, and went swiftly to look in her mirror.

"Yes."

She patted her hair and wished that he would be less formal, and call her Ruth.

"Can I speak to you a moment?"

She crossed the room and opened the door, and stood there with a smile of dark expectancy.

"Sorry to disturb you."

"Oh, I was packing. I've just finished."

She noticed that his face had a rapt look, also that there was a little blob of white paint on his right temple. Also there were paint stains on his fingers. He had been refreshing the dressing-table and the chest of drawers.

"My mother comes up on the Wednesday. I'm wondering if you would mind——"

His glance examined her room, but not because it was her room and had any perfume and mystery for him, but because it was to be his mother's room for one notable night.

"I shan't be back till the Saturday."

"Would you mind if I altered—things—a little? I'll put everything back."

She was a little puzzled, and beginning to be a little piqued.

"In what way?"

"Oh, I daresay it will not be necessary."

"Will she have much luggage?"

"No."

"I've cleared two of the drawers, and there's room in the cupboard."

"Thank you. It's very good of you to let me. I'll take care."

He glanced at her open trunk, and saw something white and neatly folded, a clean nightdress, but he did not see it as a nightdress, nor as a man like Bullard would have seen it. But he had arrived at the end of his mission, and became suddenly shy and diffident, and perhaps he was conscious of a response that was lacking. He felt vaguely dissatisfied with the occasion, not realizing that the impression emanated from her.

"I won't bother you any more."

He retreated. He appeared to dwindle away, and she closed the door on him with a sense of happenings unfulfilled. He had not spoken about her holiday, or wished her fair weather and a good time. He had just assumed her absence and shown himself glad and ready to make use of it. And she felt hurt and a little aggrieved, and convinced that he was not at all interested in her or her little affairs, and being a very warm and simple creature, quite exquisitely simple in her way, she reacted like a disregarded child, and sat down on her bed and looked pensive.

Hazzard had not been to the hospital for three days. He had been busy preparing for the great occasion, staging a piece of devoted make-believe for the beguiling of his mother; he had bought a four-pound tin of cream paint and a brush; he had arranged to hire for three nights a carpet, a small sideboard, two leather-seated chairs, four pictures in oils. The hiring of these articles had

not been an easy matter, for he had had to remove the scepticism of the owner of the second-hand furniture shop.

"What—three nights! What's the game, my lad?"

Christopher found that the truth had powers of persuasion.

"My mother is coming up from the country."

"Mother! Now—you don't tell me——"

"That is just what I am telling you. You can go and make inquiries. Mrs. Bunce—my landlady knows——"

"Mrs. Bunce of No. 7. Yes, I've done business with her."

"I'll pay in advance—if you prefer it."

"That's my motto; money down."

With the arrival of the stage properties, displacements and concealments became necessary. Christopher's two sugar-boxes were hidden away under the bed. Two decrepit chairs were given temporary standing room on the landing. There was the catering to be considered, and Mrs. Bunce agreed to board mother and son during Mrs. Mary's visit. Ophelia would wait on them.

"I don't want my mother to know, Mrs. Bunce."

"Bless your heart," said the lady, "I—can—keep a secret—sometimes."

When Ruth Avery's portmanteau had been carried downstairs, and she herself had followed it, Hazzard remained master of the whole top floor of No. 7. Ruth's door was shut, and he crossed the landing, and opening her door, went in. She had turned down the bed for the sheets to be changed, and in her basin was the water she had used, and the towels were neatly folded on the white rails. The room had a clean simplicity, and he stood there thinking that it would be just the room for his mother.

It may be that he did not hear footsteps on the stairs, or if he heard them he assumed them to be the footsteps of the Bunce girl coming up to do the room. He was bending over the bed, pressing a hand into the mattress to test the springs, for Mary Hazzard was not a good sleeper, and being the child of his mother he was a creature of quaint thoroughness and forethought.

"Oh——!"

He turned as sharply as the exclamation. He saw Ruth in the doorway, a Ruth with wide dark eyes and a vivid face, a figure of haste, breathlessness, and confusion.

He reddened.

"I'm sorry. I thought——"

She seemed to waver. There was something in her eyes that perplexed him. She seemed to glow with a sudden self-conscious radiance.

"I forgot my purse. So silly. I had to run all the way back from Conduit Street."

She was all colour and breathlessness. She crossed quickly to the chest of drawers, and opened a top drawer.

"There! Fancy my forgetting!"

He had betaken himself to the door, and he drew aside to let her pass.

"You won't miss your train?"

"I shall just manage it."

"I hope you'll have a good time."

Her eyes, confusedly, bright, met his.

"Of course. I'm so glad your mother is sleeping here. Good-bye."

She held out a hand and he took it, and was aware of the warmth and the faint pressure of her fingers.

"Good-bye."

She turned at the top of the stairs and smiled and nodded, and he saw the whiteness of her neck under the brim of her black hat as she went down the stairs. He remained for a moment staring at the dingy wallpaper. He had thought the white V of her neck rather pretty, but in two minutes he had forgotten all about it. He had so many other things to do.

On the morning of the great day Christopher Hazzard rose at five. He was in a hurry, and not a little excited; he cut himself while shaving, and spoilt a clean collar and solved the problem by appearing in Roper's Row without a collar, and with a wad of blood-stained cotton-wool adhering to his cheek. But Roper's Row was supremely his, empty and silent, with the rising sun shining down it, and the green of the plane trees closing each end of it like a curtain. He felt adventurous and exultant, like a small boy setting forth in the freshness of the dawn to rob an orchard or climb some distant and mysterious hill.

He was bound for Covent Garden market. Inevitably his mother would arrive with a bunch of flowers, but he wanted her to find flowers in her room. He bought bronze-red and white chrysanthemums; he spent two and sixpence on the flowers, and was back in Roper's Row about the time that blinds were going up, and an occasional door opening like a sleepy, yawning mouth. In the passage of No. 7 he met Ophelia with her hair in curl-papers, and bearing the white milk-jug that was to be left on the doorstep ready for the milkman.

"Lor', Mr. Hazzard, ain't you early."

Christopher felt absurdly happy, and in love with everything

and everybody. The sun was shining; even Ophelia's fringe of curl-papers suggested a halo.

"Don't forget, I shall need milk for two."

"I've got it ready, see."

She had a piece of paper with "Four pints" scrawled on it, to be tucked under the jug.

"That's forethought, Mr. Hazzard."

He extracted a red chrysanthemum and presented it to her.

"A red-letter day, Ophelia. You wear that for good luck."

Miss Bunce tucked the flower into her blue-and-white striped flannel blouse, and placed the milk-jug outside the door.

Hazzard had gone on to climb the stairs.

"Lawks!" was her reflection, "you'd think 'e 'ad a gal comin' up from the country, and not 'is ma. 'E's a queer un, and no mistake."

IV

Hazzard brought his mother from Paddington Station in a cab. Always he had known his mother to be a very wonderful woman, but her uniqueness had belonged to Wiltshire and the greenness and solitudes of downland, woods and meadows, and in London she was a stranger, a tall, dark-eyed barbarian from the west. Christopher may have wondered how she and London would meet, but for the moment of her getting into the four-wheeler he felt her to be what she was, a notable and natural gentlewoman who took to the "growler" as to a state coach, and to whom London was nothing more than a conglomeration of houses and people. She wore black, and a black low-crowned hat instead of a bonnet, and in her lap lay a sheaf of purple autumn asters and white and yellow dahlias. She sat erect, but without any suggestion of stiffness, and looked at her leisure out of the cab's windows.

There was nothing in her dark, still eyes that exclaimed, "So—this is London." She was as much herself as on the crown of Sisbury Hill, gravely regarding life, and thinking it over, well poised within herself, and not hurrying to pay homage to circumstance. So might Boadicea have driven through Camulodunum in her chariot.

She said, "Did it not strike you, Kit, at first—as being very strange?"

"What, Mother?"

"All these houses. And people choosing to be like a swarm of bees."

He admitted that in the beginning he had found London rather amazing, marvellous, and not a little terrifying. He was aware of her gazing at the shops and the people and the traffic with an impartial interest, as though she had arrived from Mars. Her handsome face, with its fine white skin, seemed—somehow—to make London look dim and smeary.

"The marvel to me, Kit, is that people should choose all this."

He let his hand rest on one of her knees as he had done when he was a very small boy being read to.

"You spoke of swarming bees, Mother. There's the queen bee."

She smiled.

"The Golden Bee, my dear. Oh, yes, I understand. Most insects and men love crowds. But to me——"

He divined her meaning, that to her London was a vast foolishness, though she grasped the blind urges of its necessity. It was a huge and urbanized Mrs. Prosser. And he sat and absorbed this new impression of his mother as a woman who had stepped down off Sisbury Hill, but who, retaining the attitude of Sisbury, could find London no higher than her knees. She overlooked St. Paul's. She remained as notable a woman to Christopher the man as she had been to Christopher the child.

He said, "You'll find Roper's Row rather small and narrow, Mother."

She turned to him suddenly with her particular smile.

"It's the inside of things, my dear. It's what you've done there—for both of us."

Vehicles could not traverse Roper's Row, and the cab stopped in Lamb's Conduit Street, and Christopher got out and paid and tipped the cabman, and laid hold of his mother's black bag.

She smiled at him.

"Eggs, my dear."

"I'll be careful."

She descended, carrying her flowers, and together they walked up Roper's Row, and to Christopher the Row became both narrower and yet more spacious. His mother was half a head taller than most London women; she held herself very straight; she moved with an air of quiet and gentle loftiness. She did not stare, but was stared at and was not troubled by it. And in walking up Roper's Row he realized his mother as his mother, a woman of many memories, a notable and beloved figure. He was as proud of her as a child.

Some instinct made Mary Hazzard enter No. 7 by way of the

shop. She had a peculiar flair for the rightness of things. She found Mrs. Bunce behind the counter.

"Good morning. You are Mrs. Bunce. I am Mrs. Hazzard."

With the flowers against the bosom of her black dress she held out a hand, and Mrs. Bunce's spectacles glimmered. Unconsciously she wiped her hand on her apron.

"Glad to see you, ma'am. I'm sure I hope you'll be comfortable. Anything we can do—we will do."

As Mrs. Bunce said later to Phelia, "Bless me—if she didn't give me a kind of shock. If the Queen had walked in I couldn't 'ave felt more so-so. You wouldn't 'ave expected a little chap to 'ave a mother like that. Now, would you? I ask you?"

Chapter Seven

I

CHRISTOPHER preceded his mother up the stairs like a chamberlain conducting a great lady to her lodging. He took the last flight quickly, with a swifter beat of heart, for Ophelia had closed both doors, and the landing was very dark when the doors were shut. Hazzard threw open both doors, and met his mother as she reached the last few steps.

She paused there, one hand on the rail. She was unused to such stairs, and her heart was not what it had been, and these London stairs were more severe than Sisbury Hill. She was feeling distressed, but she managed to hide her distress, and her pallor was a smiling mask.

"I'm not quite so young as I was, Kit."

She completed the climbing of her calvary, and crossing to the open doorway of her son's room, stood there gazing. She had not missed his look of expectancy, and she understood it, though she did not know that Christopher had dressed his stage to satisfy a mutual pride. She saw the room, neat and well furnished, and the wide and open window and, framed by it, a pleasant space enclosed by walls of brown-black brick, and the various and quaint chimneys, and a stretch of blue sky. The big and solitary poplar was fluttering its leaves and making a cool grey green flickering.

She said, "Why—how good, my dear. That window. And the air."

His sensitive face was flushed.

"Yes, it's a fine window. I sit there and work. The light is just right."

She seemed to touch and stroke the room and its objects with the calm gentleness of her glances.

"You've got such nice furniture. I've often sat and dreamed, my dear."

He was happy.

"Now, I'll show you your room. Perhaps you would like to rest a little."

In Ruth's room Mary Hazzard found the flowers that Christopher had bought that morning in Covent Garden, arranged in a

china vase borrowed from the Bunces. He had placed her bag on a chair by the bed, and she sat down on the bed and removed her hat and saw herself reflected in Ruth's mirror. The room was hers for the occasion, and she felt it to be hers and wholly hers until she got up to unpack her bag, and opened the cupboard behind the door.

A dress hung there, the plain black frock which Ruth wore on her working days, and some impulse made Mary Hazzard take it from the hook and hold it in her hands. It was a simple thing with blouse and skirt all in one piece and rather like a smock, the cuffs slightly frayed and whitened. An ink stain showed on one sleeve. And while holding the dress in her hands Mary Hazzard was clairvoyant. The dress belonged to a young woman, for she seemed to feel the thread of youth in it, and to react to some emanation that was like the faint perfume of a dark flower.

She returned the dress to its place and closed the cupboard door. She knew that she did not wish to use the cupboard, for it suggested the presence of that other woman—whoever she might be. But even when Mary Hazzard closed the door the room had ceased to be impersonal. It was both hers and not hers, and while she moved about it, unpacking and putting away her few simple belongings, she would keep glancing about her as though expecting to find other signs of Ruth Avery.

It was not suspicion, but a something far more subtle. It resembled the workings of an additional sense, a vague awareness of other presences and happenings. It would come and go. She had experienced it often as a child. It was very strongly with her at times on Sisbury Hill and when she was thinking of her son. Almost it was prophetic. She felt Kit's future. She felt—in the same way—that she had not very long to live.

When she had put her belongings in order she drew Ruth's chair to the window, and with the curtains half drawn sat in the very place where Ruth was accustomed to sit. Her tiredness had passed. The room had a gentleness. She seemed to feel that black dress hanging in the cupboard like a soft and innocent shadow. She heard the voices in the Row, and the murmur of the traffic, even her son's movements in the room across the landing. Always he had been a child of strange and sensitive understanding, spirit of her spirit and flesh of her flesh; he had left her alone for a while, for he understood that aloneness, and its necessity, even in the midst of life's intimacies.

Presently she heard his door open. He came across the landing and knocked.

"Mother."

She called him in.

"I'm quite rested now."

"Have you everything you want?"

"Everything. I hope I'm not turning anybody out—Mrs. Bunce's girl?"

"Oh, no. Miss Avery is away on holiday. It was rather lucky. Mrs. Bunce let me have the room."

"And who is Miss Avery?"

"Oh, Miss Avery. She works in an office somewhere in the City. A typist. Quite a nice little girl, and quiet, though her machine is rather a nuisance when she is working late."

"Interferes with your reading?"

"Sometimes. But it might be much worse."

Obviously, Miss Avery was just Miss Avery to Christopher, and his mother gathered that his casualness was not assumed. He was not interested in the owner of the black frock. He was still very much of a child in his attitude towards women, and it was possible that he might remain so, and Mary Hazzard was not sorry, for no mother welcomes the coming of the other woman, and to Mary her son was so much more than the young male thing. Believing—as she did—that she had not very long to live, she had no wish to share her son with some young girl. All that might happen afterwards, when her eyes were closed in the great sleep, though her feeling about it was that Kit might be one of those workers who are best left untrammelled by marriage.

For she was wise as to his nature. She saw in him a man-child who would need the mother in woman more than the sex-mate, some gentle and sensitive creature whose egotism would not resent his preoccupations, a woman who could watch and wait and listen, and such women are exceptional. In fact his proper mate, if he had one, would be a being somewhat like himself, shy and sensitive, unshaken by sex storms, sharing him without making a passion of his possessiveness.

For there would be the afterwards. Some other woman—if she appeared upon his earth—would be the afterwards, and yet to Mary Hazzard's inspired love her son's afterwards implied so much more than sex. She believed that he would attain to fame, the fame that is worth while. He would do things, beautiful, helpful, healing things, not the things that bring notoriety and riches.

Meanwhile, he was waiting for her to go into that other room, his room, and a little cheerful clinking of crockery made itself

heard from the stairs. Miss Ophelia Bunce was ascending with the tea-tray, wearing her Sabbath blouse, and her curls unpapered.

"Tea, Mother."

They crossed to Christopher's room where Phelia was all eyes and heavy breathing. She stared at Christopher's mother as at something strange and unexpected from the country.

"Will you be pouring out?"

Mary Hazzard smiled at her, and appeared to absorb the whole of Ophelia at one glance.

"Yes, I shall be pouring out."

II

Afterwards they sat at Ruth's window and talked, for Miss Bunce would arrive to clear away the tea-things, and Ophelia's presence in a room was as obvious as her breathing. It suggested a stuffy, flurried, voluble upbringing, things done haphazard and in a hurry, tonsils and adenoids unattended to. So much of life is like that.

Roper's Row had arrived at that blessed hour when the work of the day was either finished or about to be finished, and when it became jocund and garrulous at doorways and windows. The young husband across the way had returned, and there were little squeals and giggles behind the red geraniums. Christopher had noticed how glum and silent the Row was between six and eight o'clock in the morning, heavily oppressed by the business of going to work, and how between six and eight in the evening it became debonair and loquacious and often argumentative.

"Just like a lot of starlings," said his mother.

Kit reminded her that birds sang at daybreak, but that you never heard Roper's Row arising and saluting the dawn with song. And she looked wise, and had her answer ready.

"Man's a lazy creature in the main, my dear. He has to have hunger and a woman and children at the back of him."

"Always?"

Her eyes met his, and Kit's eyes were teasing.

"Oh, not you. There are the exceptions. Your father was one of them. When he had a job to do he always went to it whistling. He was just as inquisitive as a child, always contriving to do things differently. Work was his play, and you're like him."

"It's the same at the hospital. Most of the men are casual. And they don't like you to be too keen."

Mary Hazzard gave her son one of her deep glances. So—he

had found that out, just as his father had discovered it before the white death had claimed him. And there was another thing that—doubtless—Kit would discover: the amazing self-complacency of the crowd, and the way the crowd man stands with his stupid hands in his pockets and allows his opinions to be heard on this fellow and that, for in casually praising or criticizing some man who does some particular thing supremely well the crowd man feels that he has put the expert fellow in his proper place. The doing of the supremely difficult things is for the devoted few.

"Jealousy," said Mary Hazzard. "They used to call their god a jealous god. Pull that flower, my dear, and put it in your buttonhole."

Her eyes looked at the red geraniums in the window-box across the way, but her inward gaze went far beyond the window and those flowers. Again she was visualizing the afterwards, Kit's quest of the Red Flower which all men covet, that flower of bitter sweetness. For Mary Hazzard had read her *Pilgrim's Progress* many times, and in considering Kit's pilgrimage she beheld Giant Prejudice in place of Giant Despair, and the Slough of the Conventions where the burning hearts of little beggar-boys are cooled and smothered. She saw her son passing all the tests, collecting prizes and qualifications, becoming wholly and completely Dr. Hazzard, —but how much doctoring would the world allow him?

She asked Christopher a question.

"When you are qualified, my dear, what then?"

He did not answer her at once.

"That may depend. I want to go on. I want to go on exploring. I don't want to be one of the fellows who just swallow what other men tell them."

Her deep eyes lit up.

"You're just like your father. Don't be frightened of faces, my dear."

From that other window along the Row came the voice of the gaillard soul who sang

> "Nothing to do but die, nothing to do but die.
> When you've come to the end of your days
> There's nothing to do but die."

III

On the morning of the great day Mary Hazzard was awakened by Christopher knocking at her door.

"I've made you a cup of tea, Mother."

He came in, wearing an overcoat over his nightshirt, for Mary made her son's nightshirts, and as yet no Hazzard had worn pyjamas.

"How's the day, Kit?"

"Sun shining. Slept well?"

"Oh, pretty well. One can be just a little bit excited even at my age, my dear."

He kissed her and left her to drink her tea, and when she had emptied the cup she put it aside on a chair, and lay and meditated. She was much and strangely aware of herself as an old woman in a young woman's bed, her head upon the pillow that was pressed by the head of Ruth Avery, an obscure little girl who worked in a city office. And the peculiar part of it was that Mary could not forget that black dress hanging in the cupboard like the very shadow of the girl herself.

But she did not wish to feel too fey on such a day as this, and she rose and, going to the window, lifted the edge of the blind and looked out. She saw the red flowers across the way, and remembered that it was autumn and that winter was near. Also she remembered the voice of that lugubriously gay fellow, and that women come and women go. And with a kind of consenting and grave sadness she poured out water into Ruth's basin, and washed.

IV

Christopher and his mother drove to the hospital in a cab, both of them in black, and Hazzard wearing a new bowler hat that had been bought for the occasion, and were silent, but Mary Hazzard's silence was different from the silence of her son. For her the day had no shadows save the shadow of the afterwards, but to Christopher had come the thought of hostile faces, and how they would appear to his mother, and she to them. Would she see and understand that at "Bennet's" he was something of an outcast?

His courage quivered in him. He did not want her to be hurt. She had been hurt sufficiently because of him.

When the cab turned into Snow Street his silence was abruptly broken.

"You'll meet Moorhouse, Mother, to-day."

"Yes, you told me."

"He's my friend. They're not all my friends."

She felt the tenseness of him, that quivering sensitive courage, just as she had felt it in the old days when he had kissed her before

going to school. She understood. And something was embattled in her, a tender and scornful wrath, a devotion that stood fast.

"Jealous some of them. Never you mind. One friend is worth it."

Hazzard glanced for a moment at his mother.

"Yes—you—you and Moorhouse. The rest can go to hell."

The forecourt at "Bennet's" seemed very full of cabs and of carriages and when their own particular cab drew up outside the great grey portico Hazzard got out and held the door open for his mother. She stepped out of the cab like the woman she was, deliberate, dark-eyed, faintly smiling, but with a smile that had a glint of scorn. She knew her people, and she knew her son. She was just as conscious as he was of all those faces beyond the doors, of young men in black coats, and grey heads, and mothers and aunts and sisters, and the animation and the silence and the stares. She had no need to gather herself to meet that crowd in the corridor, all those Sabbath people in their proper clothes. She was herself, and her son was a prizeman. She entered, wearing the pallor of her pride.

Moorhouse was waiting. He met them with his air of easy, indolent kindness. He was not a prizeman, but he was something else.

"This is splendid, Mrs. Hazzard."

And Christopher's mother and Christopher's friend looked into each other's eyes, and knew each other for what they were.

"It's a great day for me, Mr. Moorhouse."

He smiled at her and gazed.

"Oh, you'll have others, plenty. Let's go and get our seats."

It was undoubtedly a parental day; it rustled; it combined the atmospheres of a church service, a garden party, and an Extension Lecture. Moorhouse and the Hazzards, crossing the hospital quadrangle with its black asphalt and its grim poplars, were three figures apart. Moorhouse's people did not come to these shows. Why should they? And as they skirted a rockery that some bemused enthusiast had caused to be made out of old bricks and black clinkers, Moorhouse thought of the Avon valley, and wondered what Mrs. Hazzard would make of a rockery like that. In fact he discovered her glancing at it as they passed. But other petticoats were sweeping down on them, sails that had been spread in Highbury Grove or Holland Park, and the theatre doorway was an open mouth swallowing Victorianism.

He said, "Shall I lead the way?"

Christopher's mother answered with a movement of the head. She was neither Highbury Grove nor Holland Park, but Sisbury

Hill or a tall tree in leaf, while these good ladies were like their houses, great white or stuccoed façades, full of windows and little bits of twisted iron railing, and gate pillars with urns or plaster pineapples perched on them. They were pouring in to listen to an oration, a little crowd of suburban villas gathering to hear Big Ben.

The lecture theatre was like a great grey bubble. It had a glass eye above like the eye of the Pantheon. Moorhouse chose a tier not too high up the bank of seats, and stood until Mary Hazzard was seated. These shows amused him, but he understood that to the Hazzards the day was more serious than amusing. He dug Kit gently in the ribs, and they looked at each other and smiled, and Moorhouse's brown face made Hazzard look even more white than he was feeling. The great ones were arriving. They sat on chairs in the well of the theatre, begowned and hooded, the high priests of the profession, facing all that mock reverent youth and its solid parentage.

Mary Hazzard sat very straight and still between Julian Moorhouse and her son. She might have been on Sisbury Hill, looking down upon the Doctors and Fellows in their gowns and hoods, eminent sheep penned up in the well of the lecture theatre. She studied the faces of those men, for she supposed that in their hands they held the future of her son, for kissing goes by favour, and honours may be like kisses. She asked a few questions, and asked them of Moorhouse. Would he point out Sir Dighton Fanshawe to her?

Moorhouse pointed out Sir Dighton.

"In the middle there—next to the empty chair."

She studied Sir Dighton. She saw him as a handsome and elegant old rascal, very much at his ease, and liking this feminine crowd and its glances. The eminent physician! And she was still observing Sir Dighton when the day's great man arrived, and there were applause and flutterings and rustlings. All that solid femininity seemed to breathe more heavily and to settle its solemn skirts.

There were speeches. The Dean of the Hospital, a shy, thin, swarthy man stood up for three minutes and sat down again with evident relief. Old Sir Dighton came next, smiling and roguish and debonair, twiddling an eyeglass, and somehow managing to flatter himself and all the women. He was flowery and humorously sententious. Mrs. Mary did not like Sir Dighton.

Then came the oration. It proved to be as original and as unusual as the man who delivered it, a soldier, but not society's idea

of the soldier. He was shy, but not with a shyness that lacked dignity. Looking that middle-class audience full in the face, and with the little white tuft of hair on his chin catching the light, he delivered an address that was both unacademic and startling. In brief, he mounted a horse and pointed a spear, and tilted at the thing we call Humbug.

Moorhouse, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, watched the little soldier's benign, blue-eyed, weather-beaten face, and rejoiced and chortled inwardly. He did dare to whisper, "This —is great," and caught Mrs. Mary's eye. For the theme was so unexpected, so unprofessional; it called itself Sincerity, but like an uncompromising sword it dealt out blows impartially. It was probable, and evident, that a portion of the academic world was a little startled and shocked. Who was it who had suggested that this elderly fire-eater should be asked to address these young men? Sir Dighton, with a smirk of self-conscious and cynical amusement, played with his monocle and observed the ladies. Humbug? Well, of course! Feeling a pulse is not like handling a battery.

Christopher, a shepherd boy sitting stone-still upon a hillside, listened as to a prophet. A man of war spoke to the men of peace, and yet he spoke as that most peaceable and humane of men—the soldier who has no illusions. He did not refer to the Noblest and the Greatest of the Professions. He seemed to imply that the man and not the profession should be great and noble, simply by being sincere.

The rest followed. Obviously. He rapped out his verities in the face of youth. "Gentlemen, it is good business when you realize that you must do good business with yourself. The hardest person to convince—should be yourself. No strategy is of any use—unless you have your guns. Keep your eye on the target and shoot straight. And shoot at humbug." Yes, a great oration and yet not an oration. It did not rise nicely to the serene and soapy heights; it was not mellifluous; it matched neither Sir Dighton's eyeglass nor his smile. Some superior person described it later as "like listening to a little terrier dog barking through a fence." But somehow it captured youth.

It brought applause. It had struck sparks from all that was virile in the crowded theatre.

Moorhouse answered it with deliberate and resonant clappings of his big, brown hands.

"Great stuff!"

He leaned across to Christopher.

"Old Fanny is looking down his nose."

V

Rarely is the expectation of life's events matched by the reality, and had Mary Hazzard remained upon Sisbury Hill and imagined Christopher's great day she might have shot her arrow very close to the target. But then she would not have met Moorhouse, nor listened to the old soldier's simple credo, nor would she have felt for and with her son. She was to have her triumph, but not without wounds. She was to carry home with her a portrait of that most successful man, Sir Dighton Fanshawe.

The medals and prizes were presented. The Dean, standing beside a table upon which were books and leather cases, called out the names of the prizemen.

"Garside—Gurney Adams Prize."

The little old soldier, standing behind the table, smiled, snapped out a few kind words, and shook a hand. The prizemen, gathered below, filed past one by one to collect books, medals, envelopes containing precious cheques. There was applause, shouts from the more boisterous, "Good old Bunty!"

Christopher's turn came.

"Hazzard—Angus Sandeman Prize."

And there was silence, a silence that was made more obvious by a tentative and faint clapping from other men's mothers and sisters and aunts. They clapped politely just as they would have murmured the responses in church. Moorhouse had his head down, and his hands were still. Mary Hazzard, watching her son with dark deep eyes, felt the chill of that hostile stillness.

Said a girl's voice somewhere behind her, "Who's that funny little man?"

A young man's voice enlightened her.

"Oh, that's Squit Hazzard. Horrid little outsider."

Moorhouse's head rose with a jerk. His blue eyes lost that look of indolent good nature. His lips moved.

"Smug swine."

But his scorn was voiceless. He was too conscious of Christopher's mother sitting beside him, very pale and very proud.

Chapter Eight

I

LOITERING on the autumnal sea-front at Hastings Ruth had made a friend, a young woman of about her own age, blonde where Ruth was swarthy, and since those early October days were still and sunny, and Ruth's new friend knew more of life than Ruth did and took the lead, these young things went on expeditions together. They visited Rye and Winchelsea, and Battle Abbey; Sally Sherman made pencil sketches of Rye Church and the Mermaid Inn. She had a high colour, had Sally, and blue eyes that were more like the eyes of a boy, and a rather abrupt and "don't try the moon-calf game with me" manner. There was a good deal of the opposite sex in Sally, and perhaps that was why she saw through the ordinary man and warned him off, and went her own high-coloured way, which way was that of a young woman who lived with an aunt in a Chelsea back street and was employed in a West-end music shop.

Sally was abrupt.

"O—men——! Do they think we came down here just to be pick-ups? And that's about all most men think about, my dear."

Which, of course, was true, and Ruth knew it, but had tried to sentimentalize the crude fact, being the eternal little romanticist, while Sally somehow seemed to scorn sex, perhaps because the fierce young rebel in her feared it. Laughingly she would refer to herself as "A Safety Match." "I don't strike on any sort of surface." Her passion was "Pictures," and whether or not this obsession had soaked into her because she happened to live in Chelsea, she spent her Saturday afternoons at the Tate Gallery or the Wallace Collection, or in painting little splodgy pictures of her own that had some of the boldness of her blue eyes and the high colour of her face. At her aunt's in Vane Street she had an attic which she called her studio, a young woman's play-box, and all that she knew she had taught herself by drawing things and yet more things, dolls, people, animals, houses, odd corners of Vane Street. The urge towards self-expression was in her fingers. When times were slack at the music shop, and even the "Geisha" was not asked for, she would scrawl caricatures of her confrères on bits of paper.

On the last day but one of Ruth's holiday these two young things took the train to Robertsbridge, and changing there, travelled down the Rother Vale to Bodiam. They were bound for the castle, that black-grey shell floating like an Arthurian idyll on stillness of its moat. Bodiam and water-lilies and a green valley, and swallows skimming; but the swallows had gone, and the day had an autumnal savour.

When Sally saw Bodiam she seemed to grow redder in the face. Her blue eyes stared. Her lips appeared to be sucking the point of a pencil.

"Golly, just look!"

Her expletives might not have satisfied Matthew Arnold, but they were natural. Like a child she was delighted by colour, and effects of light and shadow; she was strangely susceptible to atmosphere.

"I must draw that."

Obviously. But tea—a cottage tea—had attractions, and a round table set just outside the fence of the caretaker's cottage, with the green grass going down to the water and the willows, and the black shell of the castle reflected in the moat.

"Just as black as a thundercloud," said Sally.

And much jam was consumed plastered thick upon country bread and butter, and Sally drank three cups of tea, and got out her sketch-book and a very black pencil, and looking like some fierce and inspired young virgin, dealt with Bodiam in her own fashion. While the other and gentler virgin sat and dreamed, and drifted towards confidential murmurings which Sally answered haphazard.

"Don't you think it very sad for a man to be lame?"

Sally was blacking in crenellations.

"Which foot——?"

"I think—yes—I think it's the left."

"Well, you ought to know. Yes, you're that sort, my dear. A puppy's just got to squeal."

"But he doesn't squeal."

"Not to you?"

"He seems so absorbed. And he's very poor."

"What—is—he?"

"A medical student."

"Golly! You be careful. They're a rowdy lot. And does he get sentimental?"

Ruth looked hurt.

"You are horrid. No, he isn't, not a bit. He doesn't seem to think of anything but his work."

Sally left Bodiam alone for the moment.

"Queer lad. Yes, I suppose there are men like that. A little touched—are you—Ruthie?"

"No, I'm not. But I feel sorry."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"I don't suppose he's sorry for himself. He's got his job. Sensible sort of lad—I should say. I'm fed up with fools in trousers."

She licked the point of her pencil.

"You be careful, Ruthie. Seems to me there are two sorts of men, those who want everything and don't care how they get it, and the sort that wants nothing—in that way. That's my feeling. But the second sort can't be very usual. Oh, lord, they're nearly all fools in trousers."

They decided to stay to see the sunset, and Sally must needs get into the old boat moored by the bridge and row herself about among the leaves of the water-lilies. She made ripple marks, and leaning over the stern of the boat, watched the level gold of the setting sun playing upon them. It was goblin ground, the enchanted mere, and she, the irresponsible child, was excited by beauty and strangeness and mystery. Ruth stood on the footbridge and watched her, a pensive, musing Ruth, who, when the castle itself was attacked, refused to climb the dark, winding stair.

"Oh, I couldn't."

"Don't be silly."

"You go up, Sally. I'm afraid of heights."

Sally appeared afraid of nothing, and emerging upon the battlements and choosing the most dangerous of perches, behaved like one of the jackdaws.

"I should love to jump into the moat, Ruthie. I wonder how deep it is."

"Oh, don't! Do come down."

"I say, the sunset's simply gorgeous. The whole valley looks full of fire. Come up."

"I can see it quite well here. What time is the train?"

"Any train, my dear, on a day like this."

The west was a crimson curtain unfurled to touch the hills, and Ruth and Sally, walking with arms linked, each looked at the world and saw it as "My world." Youth is not impersonal, and Ruth was a mirror reflecting—"My sunset, my grass, my trees." She would add "My man" to it, and think the little world ready to be complete. Sally was just as personal, but more inclined to be satisfied with "My world and I—and a paint-box."

But she squeezed Ruth's arm.

"We're going to keep this up, aren't we?"

"Oh, of course."

"You must come and see my little 'stoo-jo' at Chelsea."

II

There were certain things that Mary Hazzard felt moved to say to her son. She sat at his window, and watched the sunlight on the flickering leaves of the poplar tree, and thought of all the proud and patient years that were behind her, and all the pride and the patience that must needs be his. She clasped her dignity. She was able to see the dignity in her son, that "horrid little outsider," the unusual child of an unusual mother. She had watched her world and pondered it, and always she had been posed by the problem of the Somehow Good and the Somehow Greedy. Her feeling was that virtue, virtue as the Greeks understood it, was there in the germ, and to that extent she was a fatalist. Seed is good, bad, and indifferent, and human seed is like other seed. The oaf, the fool, and the bully are foredoomed in the womb. She had realized the immense inertia of ignorance, and that prejudice and persecution are vociferous brats born of that very inertia. Men—as a rule—do not think cruelly, or plan brutishness; on the contrary they do not think, and brutishness plans itself. The human animal may like to lie in the straw, and let the saliva dribble and its eyes stare roundly at nothing; it resents the goad, the prick of the unusual, the impertinence of an inspiration. Inertia would set its hoof upon progress.

She had seen the feet of cattle stodging the mire in Melfont.

She drew a breath and held it.

"Show it me again, Kit."

He was sitting with his crossed arms on the table, looking at the sky above all those chimney-stacks and cubes of brick. His face wore an expression that she had seen on it often when he was a child, something questioning, and a little plaintive. "Why do they hate me? What am I, or what is it that I do? Why——?" He had never asked her that question, but all her life she had been answering it.

He came out of his stare.

"The medal?"

"Yes."

He had the leather case in his breast-pocket, and he drew it out and opened it and showed her the gold disc lying in its crimson

bed. The medal bore an inscription, and Mary, taking the case from the hand of her son, read the words, "*Victoria et pro victoria vita.*" She pondered them, and asked Christopher their meaning.

"Victory, Mother, and for victory—life."

She smiled to herself momentarily.

"Does it mean that a man should give his life?"

"Perhaps. Your life for your work, if people will let you."

"Ah," she said, "that's for you to say, my dear. In the burden and the heat of the day cattle take to the shade of the trees or go down to laze in the water. But the reaper takes his scythe."

She placed the case and the medal upon the table.

"That's the provocation. It always has been and always will be. It isn't always hate, my dear, and it isn't always jealousy. The man in the sun with the scythe shames those who lie under the hedges. And I don't suppose they call it or feel it shame. They invent other words and things to save their faces."

Hazzard pushed his chair back, and rising, stood looking at the medal. Then he bent down and kissed his mother on the forehead.

"You're the one soul I want to please. People chuck stones, and stones hurt, but they needn't stop you. I'm not a dog."

Her arm went round him.

"My dear, I know how difficult it is, not to feel bitter. Let the stones lie. There was a time when I used to pick them up and throw back. But that's not worth while. I've learnt better. Indifference is the thing, making them feel what they are, jackals. You see, you and I, my dear, like to walk with ourselves, and ignorant people feel lost if they aren't smelling each other's sweat."

Christopher's head went up, for he heard footsteps on the stairs, and picking up the case he snapped the lid to and slipped it into his pocket. But the climber was Moorhouse come to ask them to go round to Bernard Street and have supper with him. He tweaked Hazzard's ear, playfully and without patronage, and spoke to the mother.

"This young fellow has all our noses out of joint. How does Sir Christopher Hazzard sound? Rather well."

Mrs. Mary looked deep.

"It might sound, Mr. Moorhouse, like Sir Dighton Fanshawe."

And Moorhouse laughed.

"No, never. A lion stuffed with small talk. I can see myself down in the country, a conscientious sort of duffer, sending up people to see Sir Christopher Hazzard. And mind you stick them, my lad."

Said the mother, "I do think money's about the last thing Kit would remember."

Moorhouse nodded at her.

"Yes, for the love of the thing. But then, Mrs. Hazzard, that's the queerest part of it, people don't seem to value the things they get for love."

III

Mary Hazzard saw little of the sights of London. She asked to be taken to Westminster, and she saw the Abbey and Whitehall, and the Life Guards in scarlet and silver on their black horses, and the window of the Inigo Jones Banqueting Hall from which the Martyr King stepped to his death. Charles I was one of Mary Hazzard's great men, a figure passionately loved and passionately hated, extolled and lied about, a gentleman dragged down and trampled upon by brewers and tradesmen. Kit's mother was all for the gentleman, and that was why she fell to Julian Moorhouse. Gentle is as gentle does, and much is allowed to a lad with manners and good looks.

Christopher saw his mother off from Paddington on a serene autumn evening. She stood in the doorway of the third-class carriage, tall and dark and with that dignity which is discovered in some peasant women and great ladies. The adventure was at an end; she had more than a feeling that she and London would not meet again; the sun would be setting behind Sisbury Hill.

She looked at her son.

"I have had two good days, Christopher."

Hazzard saw her almost as a figure in a picture, a woman—dear and splendid—looking down out of memory, and memorable in mien and manner. The guard came to close the door, and Mary Hazzard drew back, and then moved forward again to rest her hands on the lowered window.

"Good-bye, my son."

She bent down to kiss him. It was a benediction in which compassion and pride were mingled.

"You will be coming down soon."

"Yes."

"Don't leave it too long. The winter's coming, and I'm not so young as I was."

His face was the face of a child.

"I'll have you with me years yet. Remember what Moorhouse said."

The whistle blew, and as the train moved off she stretched out a hand and touched his shoulder.

Hazzard was both sad and happy. He had worn the face of a

child during the parting with his mother, and his mood was that of a child when he set out to walk back to Roper's Row. He had the sunset behind him, and its strange evanescent brilliance filling the mundane streets with an illusion of softness and beauty. Sooty bricks made patterns of gold. And Hazzard's youth looked upwards out of that world of ordered confusion, that dark pool in which all that was unhopeful in man spumed as it pleased. To him on that October evening the streets were not the "bitter streets" of Euripides, but threads in a great web, mysterious, tremulous with life's effort. He walked towards the impending night, and limped into its great cave with its loops and ladders of light, and saw dim faces float past, and was conscious of an urge and a restlessness. His child's mood broadened into the man's. He asked questions, but as a man asks them. How much of life was blind impulse? Were not most of these mannerless people like the cells of the body, dimly fulfilling a function, carrying with them a little vague consciousness, but no knowledge of the why and whither? How many of these cell-souls could look a week or a month or a year ahead? The riddle of the Sphinx! Sex cell crying out for sex cell, stomach cell flushing with its juice the muscle fibres of a sheep, nerve cell jarred and reacting. London seemed to him to be just a mass of human cells, a mosaic of protoplasmic happenings, while he—— Yes, the thing was to be a brain, a purpose, a plan. Consciousness was the thing, consciousness and yet more consciousness.

When he reached Red Lion Square darkness had been drawn across the tops of the plane trees. Entering Roper's Row he became aware of a group of figures outside No. 7, bunched about the helmet of a police constable, and from this group a voluble voice emerged. It was the voice of Mrs. Bunce, angry and protesting. "I don't call it fun. No, sir, it's not my idea of fun. Charging into a respectable 'ouse like a lot of cattle, and breakin' furniture. If you'd bin 'ere, Officer, I'd 'ave given the young blighters in charge. Ragging, what——! I'd teach 'em somethink." Hazzard, with a feeling that the soft veil of the night's mystery had been torn, and that things vulgar and violent had happened, pushed gently towards the door of No. 7.

Mrs. Bunce discovered him.

"Oh, 'ere's Mr. 'Azzard. Nice goings-on. A lot of those young gents from the 'ospital——"

But Hazzard did not wait upon her grievances and her indignation, or to pay his respects to the policeman and his notebook; he went up the stairs as fast as his lame leg would allow him to go, afraid with the fear of a poor devil to whom guffaws and smash-

ings may mean—not disaster—but semi-starvation. The gas was burning on the landing, and the door of his room stood open. He saw a pile of broken furniture, and perched on the top of the pile a figure contrived out of his second-hand dress suit stuffed with a pillow and sheets. The head of the figure was represented by a teapot arranged upside down, the spout to the rear, and on this white china head some wag had stuck Hazzard's two-and-elevenpenny cap.

But it was not the comic insult that made the soul of him wince. He was looking at the smashed furniture, and especially at those pieces that had been hired for the occasion. He would have to pay for them; a part of that precious prize money would have to be sacrificed.

Still wearing his bowler hat he entered Ruth's room, where his mother had slept, and sat down upon the bed. And he remembered his mother's words. Indifference. Give the world indifference, and you will conquer it.

Chapter Nine

I

MOORHOUSE happened upon all this disorder before Hazzard had set about disentangling the breakages. He arrived at Christopher's door in time to see the effigy with its cap and china head; and Moorhouse was ready to be angry.

"Bullard and his gang, I suppose?"

"Yes, Bullard."

"Look here, Hazzard, this beastliness has got to be stopped. There's ragging and ragging. You'll go and see the Dean. These fellows will have to pay."

But Hazzard, with a curious quietness, proceeded to remove the dummy, and to justify his philosophy.

"No, Moorhouse, I shan't. They will be expecting to hear me scream. I'll deny them that pleasure."

"You'll say nothing?"

"Not a word."

"But, my dear chap!"

Hazzard was removing the stuffing of sheets and pillow from his waiter's suit.

"You know—my mother's rather a unique woman. I'm thankful to those beasts—in a way—that they didn't do this while she was here. She gave me some rather good advice."

"Hazzard, your mother's a——"

"She is. Indifference was the word she used. I'm going to try it —at 'Bennet's'."

He was not boasting. It was as though he had gained a strange accession of self-confidence, and that his mother from her spiritual body had poured into him mystic nourishment. Moreover, there is an element of mysticism in all men who have the creative urge, also a kind of superhuman patience, and an inspired pertinacity in the face of opposition. The incident marked a very distinct crisis in Hazzard's career. He met it and pressed it aside with an air of apparent indifference. Almost he began to smile at hostility.

Mrs. Bunce had to be placated and reassured. "I can't put up with these goings-on, Mr. 'Azzard, I can't—reely." And very quietly he assured her that such things would not happen again, though he had no material reasons to offer. He compounded with

the owner of the furniture for the breakages, and came out of the transaction seven pounds the poorer, but not in spirit. Something had hardened in him.

He himself was conscious of it on the morning after the affair when he set out for the hospital, and found that somehow he had lost that old shrinking feeling, and that he was tense with a combative audacity. He crossed the forecourt, and nodded at Sweeny the head porter, "Good morning, Sweeny," and Sweeny, being an Irishman, gave him back a genial "Morning to you, sir." He hung up his cap in the cloak-room. With his hands in his trousers pockets he limped along the main corridor, and happened—by some strange chance—upon Bullard, a Bullard who was crashing with elephantine haste from a late breakfast after a rowdy night.

Hazzard aimed and fired his shot.

"Morning, Bullard. Much obliged to you for not breaking the teapot."

And Bullard stared at him, and appeared to falter on his big legs like a bull elephant hit full on the forehead by half an ounce of lead.

"Much obliged—are you?"

"Rather. I'm keeping it as a memento."

They went their ways, and in Patricia Ward Hazzard found Ardron and Soames and a few others immersed in an atmosphere of suppressed expectation. They were like a lot of girls on the edge of an attack of giggles. Hazzard, with his hands still in his pockets, paused to look at the specimen glasses on the table near the glass swing-doors. He was aware of Soames watching him, and smothering a soapy splutter.

"Any new cases?"

"Cases! Oh, one or two."

Soames was tremulous with expectation. Christopher picked up a specimen glass and examined the contents.

"What's that? I bet you don't know."

Soames opened his mouth and closed it.

"Bile," he said.

"Think so? Guess again," and Hazzard carefully replaced the specimen glass, and with a smile limped on towards Ardron who was scribbling on a case sheet.

"Morning, Ardron. Soames must have jaundice. He thinks there's bile in No. 7's specimen."

Ardron's goat's eyes seemed to grow more prominent.

"Bile? That's rather good, even for Soames. I say—Soapy, don't you know?"

Soames spluttered.

"Ask Hazzard—how he liked that——"

"Oh, congratulations," said Christopher. "Your head's rather like that bit of china, Soames, only not so useful."

And he laughed and the others laughed, with the exception of Soames, and for the first time young men laughed with Hazzard and not at him.

II

An outside porter carried Ruth's portmanteau from Charing Cross Station to Roper's Row, and since Ruth could never feel sure of that casual creature—man—she kept very close to the gentleman with the luggage, expecting him to bolt suddenly down some side street. In spite of London and the routine of a city office she had no very sure grip as yet upon the realities. She was both afraid of things happening or of them not happening. Sally Sherman could have told her that a rather decrepit and snuffling old cockney would not take suddenly to his heels and disappear with a shabby piece of luggage and the unpromising possibilities of a young woman's wardrobe. Her brown eyes continued to be anxious until Roper's Row was reached, and the man deposited the portmanteau just inside the door of No. 7, removed his cap, and made much of a moist forehead.

She gave him a shilling, and he looked at it dubiously.

"It's one and a tanner, Miss. You can't expect——"

Her eyelids flickered. She groped in her handbag and brought out a sixpence. Like most sensitives she was the easy victim of bald-headed assurance.

"Thank you, Miss. Can I carry it up?"

Hurriedly, and fearing the demand for yet another sixpence, she assured him that she could manage, and he pulled his cap over one eye, and winking at a successful piece of bluff, scuffled off to the nearest pub.

Mrs. Bunce made an appearance through the glass door leading into the shop, and Mrs. Bunce was in one of her expansive and motherly moods. There were days when she was taciturn and touchy, the victim of too much sitting and starchy food and stewed tea, and complaining, "Me liver's like a bag of lead." She welcomed Ruth. "My, you do look well, my dear. You're quite nice and brown. Phelie will 'elp you up with the luggage." So the brown portmanteau was bumped up the stairs between a heavily breathing Ophelia and a flushed Ruth, and Mrs. Bunce stood by Ruth's window and remained to talk.

Mrs. Bunce was sure that everything in Ruth's room was all right, though there had been alarms and excursions, and Ruth, who was taking off her hat, looked troubled.

"Nothing has happened, I hope."

Mrs. Bunce felt that her news would be appreciated.

"A lot of young gents from the 'ospital came, and broke up poor Mr. 'Azzard's furniture. Some of it only 'ired too while his mother was up."

Ruth looked poignant.

"But why——?"

"Young men will be young men, my dear, and medical students always were a rowdy lot. And Mr. 'Azzard's what you'd call a little bit pi. 'E does work so 'ard, and men never do like a young fellah who keeps his nose too close to the grindstone."

"Was his mother here?"

"Not when it 'appened. A fine woman to look at—and manners, but I can tell you I was that upset. A reg'lar crowd tearing up my stairs. I sent for the perlice."

"Was Mr. Hazzard in?"

"No. They left the mess for 'im to find. He'd gone to see 'is mother off."

"The beasts," said Ruth, and sat down on her bed, feeling herself strangely angry and distressed; "what beasts men are, Mrs. Bunce."

"Oh, they're just wild, my dear; they don't think. I must say Mr. 'Azzard took it very well."

"Can't he prosecute them and get the money back?"

" 'E could, my dear, but 'e said to me, 'They've had their joke, Mrs. Bunce, and I've got to pay. I'll grin and pay.' Now, that's the right sort of spirit. I can't abide a man who whines."

Ruth was gazing out of her window.

"Well, I think they were beasts."

Mrs. Bunce shrugged her shoulders, and went below to see whether the kettle was boiling, for Mr. Reginald Crapp, who was something at Somerset House, set the bell wires twitching violently if his meat tea didn't arrive punctually at half-past six. And Ruth remained sitting on her bed, a young woman back from her one holiday, and feeling both glad and sorry, and aware of Roper's Row and of No. 7 as a place of heart-burnings and romance. The red geraniums were still in flower in the window-box across the way, and Christopher's mother had slept in the bed, and that door on the other side of the landing still hid the man with the lame foot. Poor Mr. Hazzard! And she got up suddenly, and

opened her door, and gliding across the landing, found Christopher's door ajar. She listened. She knocked gently. "Mr. Hazzard——?" But there was no answer, and she returned with secret thoughts to her own room, and knelt down and unstrapped the brown portmanteau. Probably he would be back before long, and half of her listened while the other half unpacked and put clothes away.

Presently she heard his footsteps on the stairs, and having arrived at an understanding with herself that had travelled beyond the making of excuses, she ventured out to meet him. Ten significant days had elapsed, and she was back from a holiday, and possibly he had missed her. She was darkly animated, with a colour that was ready to come and go. And she felt so sorry for him. At least—that seemed to be her heart's justification.

She looked like a very dark rose waiting for him with her perfume. She smiled, and her smile said, "I'm back. And you are going to ask me how I enjoyed myself. And you are going to appear glad." He came up the stairs thinking of other things, and when he discovered her his face was no more than a mirror reflecting the reality of her being there.

He nodded, smiled, and paused on the top step.

"Had a good time?"

Yes, she had had a very good time, and the weather had been perfect, and she had made a friend. She did not divulge the sex of the friend.

"I hope you found everything all right."

"Oh, yes. And your mother enjoyed herself?"

"I think so."

There was a pause. She looked at him just a little wistfully. She was satisfied neither with herself nor with him. They were being so formal. And what was more puzzling to her was his seeming lack of shyness, for she had thought of him as a shy man, even more shy than she was. His face was all profile. He appeared to be talking to an acquaintance while edging almost imperceptibly towards his door.

"How silly," she thought, "of both of us. I suppose he's careful because we live so close to each other. It's nice of him"—and being a precipitate creature both in her advances and retreats, she let the impulse out.

"I do think it was mean and beastly of those fellows."

She was aware of his face growing suddenly stiff. His eyes seemed to stare.

"I beg your pardon?"

She began to flush and to feel flurried.

"I mean—those students. Mrs. Bunce told me——"

"She did?"

"Yes. I think she thought I might find—— But I didn't find anything. Everything is perfect in my room."

"I'm glad."

His curtness was like the closing of a door, and she felt agitated and perplexed, wondering if she had offended him, and if so—how? Surely he did not resent sympathy when it was so sincere and spontaneous—and her sympathy?

Her dark lashes flickered.

"You do know what I mean, don't you? I think people can be so beastly."

He gave her a little smile, and turned towards his door.

"Oh, they're just fools, Carlyle's fools. So many odd millions of them. But please don't worry. It won't happen again. You won't be disturbed."

Her eyes opened wide.

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of that—at all, not for a moment."

"So there is nothing to worry about. Good night."

And he went in and gently but firmly closed his door, and something in her wilted, and she returned to her brown portmanteau and stood and stared. Why was he so funny? And what had she said that she ought not to have said? Nothing that she could think of. She really had felt so sorry, impulsively and almost tenderly sorry, and he had been so curt and cold. Yes, life was very baffling and disappointing. She found herself wondering how Sally Sherman would have handled the situation.

III

Mrs. Prosser was going shopping in Melfont. She had the two youngest of her "little darlings" with her, Gladys and Cyril, two little porkers who stopped whenever their mother stopped, which was often, and found some means of making nuisances of themselves. The October day being rather chilly, Gladys's nose tended to a wetness, but the Prossers were a wet family, and handkerchiefs were rationed. Mrs. Prosser enjoyed nothing so much as an afternoon's shopping, though the shopping was but a portion of the adventure. She diverged into every possible doorway or gate, and left behind her a perfume of wet moist flannel and her views—which were apt to be moist and more red than grey.

From the lane Mrs. Prosser saw Mary Hazzard standing on a

ladder under the big "Blenheim" close to the hedge. Mary was wearing a red shawl pinned across her bosom, and her figure was the figure of a young woman, which, of course, in Mrs. Prosser's opinion was absurd. It was her custom to refer to slim women as "skinny," or to accuse them of tight lacing.

Mrs. Prosser diverged.

"Good afternoon to you, Mary."

Mrs. Hazzard placed an apple in her basket, and looked at Mrs. Prosser over the hedge."

"So—you be back from London."

"So it seems."

"And how's poor little Christopher?"

"He's very well."

"Didn't I hear some sort of gossip—about him taking a prize? You do hear strange things."

"Yes, you do. Would you like to step in and see my son's medal? They call it the Angus Sandeman Medal."

Mrs. Prosser took up the challenge, and the two women went in, leaving Gladys and Cyril kicking the palings of Mary Hazzard's fence and swinging on her gate. Mary took the mother into her parlour, and unlocking the drawer of an oak bureau, brought out a leather case.

"Christopher received this from the hands of General Ponsonby."

"Did he now? What's inside?"

Mary pressed the spring, and raised the lid, and allowed Mrs. Prosser to look down her snout at that very solid piece of gold.

"Why, just like a new penny."

"Not quite. It's gold."

"Real gold?"

"Of course. Christopher asked me to keep it for him. That was part of the prize. He received a cheque for fifty pounds."

"Dear, dear," said Mrs. Prosser, "now isn't that something to marvel at! Such a poor, delicate little chap too. You ought to be careful, Mary, that he doesn't overwork himself, or he may go off like his father."

Mary Hazzard closed the leather case.

"So—you see—it wasn't all gossip, Sarah. And I have had the medal insured."

Meanwhile the two "little darlings" were in the thick of Mrs. Mary's apple-tree, doing as much damage as it was possible for them to do in the time that was available. Their mother, waddling out, saw them and shouted, "Come down out of that—you rascals," but her shouting was part of the mere Prosser noise. Inwardly she

applauded her children for breaking and marauding, because they were her children and exemplifiers of Prosser vigour and boldness.

"Come down out of that. They're so full of spirits, Mary; nothing delicate about them. If you ask me—I'd rather have a healthy child than a gold medal."

She went upon her way with her two piglings, feeling that she had done some useful rooting and tramplings, and that a woman like Mary Hazzard needed the blunt truth on occasions. Them Hazzards! Gold medals indeed! Did you ever? Thank Heaven her children were not little bookish, dot-and-go-one prigs. But her various conversations in Melfont dealt with Christopher Hazzard's gold medal, and the uselessness of gold medals, and the inflated notions certain people had. She found sympathizers. "That little squib of a chap. I know them little clever squits. I tell you—Mrs. So-and-so, it won't last. It's just proud flesh, my dear. Some day he'll snuff out like a candle, just as his father did. He always was a precocious little scut."

Half an hour before sunset Mary Hazzard climbed Sisbury Hill. She had to pause three or four times during the ascent, but the very climbing of Sisbury Hill and the outlook that it gave her always produced in her a feeling of serenity. She was there with time and space, and sheltered by the grey menhir if the wind blew too keenly, and high above Prosserdom. She could see the sun sink, and his level rays streaming eastwards towards London.

Also, she could think of London differently now, of the London that was Christopher, and her thoughts could sit down intimately in her son's room, and even at this distance she could feel him at work by that open window high up among the chimneys. He, too, might be the victim of prejudice, but he had a friend, and friendship matters more than the mob.

But on this particular evening her thoughts flew forward to the time when there would be no watching figure on Sisbury Hill, and her son would be alone with the world. He would miss her. She was sure of that. But how much would he miss her, and would there be anyone to take her place? For she had a feeling that it is not good for a man to be too much alone in the world, and that work is not everything. There should be someone to work for and to understand why the work is done.

Chapter Ten

I

THIS was the beginning of Hazzard's last year as an unqualified student of medicine.

Clerkships, dresserships, lectures were behind him; he had spent his month helping to bring children into the world, little Jews, little Italians, little Russians, some English, many of them born under conditions of filthiness unsuspected by the people who did their shopping in Oxford Street. Life here was like green slime under a thin covering of white marble. Hazzard marvelled, and yet was too furiously intent upon observing this and that to stir up an elemental and compassionate nausea. He was free of the hospital, to spend such time as he pleased in the out-patient departments, doing "skins" and "eyes" and "nose and throats"; he saw and listened and touched with a sedulous sincerity; he found his pleasures in the post-mortem room, and in the bacteriological and pathology labs. Bacteriology was his peculiar passion, for in studying the infinitely little he felt in touch with origins and causes.

Also, there had been a very perceptible change in the attitude of "Bennet's" towards him. There were young men who said that the last rag had been a caddish affair, young men who were more ready to model themselves on Moorhouse than on Bullard. Moreover, courage counts, and the thing which we English call sportsmanship, and possibly it began to be realized that this little lame fellow had shown both courage and magnanimity. He had kept a stiff neck and a smile. The epithet of "Squit" fell from him; he became—just Hazzard.

But it was more than a surname. It symbolized the man whom other young men had come to think of as "an extraordinary chap." He might be an oddity, but he was becoming an impressive oddity, a person. Besides, his brilliancy could not be doubted or fobbed off, and more especially so when his doings brought a lustre to the hospital, and men at other hospitals began to ask, "That fellow Hazzard's at your shop, isn't he?" Because it was known that Hazzard had wiped out the élite of Bart's, and Guy's, and London, and Thomas's, in the last examination for the first part of the "Fellowship." And that—as the vulgar knew—took

some doing. It meant that the man who could do it was a planetary person. Now and again in the competitive welter of the examining world a name emerged like the head of a serpent from a mass of seething, squirming coils. It had a uniqueness, a significance. Other men heard of "Mercer of Bart's," or "Pearson of George's," or "Hazzard of Bennet's." Idiosyncrasies were allowed to such men. They had some right to be peculiar. Mere jealousy became fatuous and futile. Their very oddities tended to become classical, they were "Little Corporals"—or "Lame Byrons," and so even Hazzard's contrivings, that had seemed sordid and ridiculous, tended to develop into characteristic attributes. Almost it began to be bad form to remember that he had been pelted with overripe plums at a pub in Islington. Rather it was said, "Extraordinary chap, helped to keep himself by playing a fiddle, and handing plates round in some place in Fleet Street." Remarkable as the change was it was unquestioned. Even Bullard accepted the epithet of "Teapot," and Soames ceased to splutter in the presence of a little, lame outsider. Also, it is probable that Moorhouse's blond glow helped to illumine the picture, for to be the Orestes to a Pylades who was the best-dressed and best-looking fellow in a community of young fellows, was to hold a notable claim to decency and debonairness.

Meanwhile it was winter, season of fog and wet feet, when Ruth took a roll of dry stockings with her in the attaché-case that carried her lunch and changed them behind the green baize screen in the clerks' room. Mr. George, of Fogson and George, her employers, surprised her one morning behind the screen, with one stocking on and one stocking off. Ruth had a pretty foot, though the modern foot is not seen at its best when naked. Mr. George looked amused. He was an arrogant little man with one of those faces that are raw and shiny with animal heat.

"Bad weather for stockings, Miss Avery."

He was facetious, but obviously interested. Ruth was afraid of Mr. George. She preferred old Fogson, who was large and pallid and unexcitable.

"I'm so afraid of catching cold, sir."

"Oh, well—you know, we should be very considerate. Do you have to come far?"

She dissembled.

"From Bloomsbury. The buses were full this morning. Sometimes you are lucky."

"That's so," said Mr. George with his hard blue eyes fixed upon her bent head and pretty neck.

November was cold, a raw, bitter, stagnant month, yellow with fog. The pavements sweated. The daylight seemed to come grudgingly in the morning, and to slink away and disappear at four o'clock behind the fog-smothered glimmer of the street lamps. In this cold weather Ruth would walk to and from the City, meeting the early rawness of the morning, and returning in the dim, yellow darkness. Even the stairs of No. 7 Roper's Row smelt of the fog. She would go up to her room, and put a match to a very small fire, for she could afford a very small fire. She earned thirty shillings a week. Also her casual work brought in a few shillings.

In the room across the landing Hazzard had no fire. He sat and worked in his overcoat, or went to bed early and read by the light of an oil lamp. His overcoat, having to do duty both indoors and outdoors, had developed a shininess about the elbows and collar; and the buttonholes were frayed.

Ruth's eyes had observed those buttonholes. She wanted to come to their rescue. She was ready with a little human warmth, and the succour of her ministering hands, but Hazzard seemed insensible both to cold and to heat. Once or twice she faltered on the edge of an impulse, but was reproved by his air of self-engrossed indifference.

Their comings and goings crossed occasionally with every appearance of casual friendliness.

"Isn't it cold to-day!"

"Very."

His asceticism included an economy of words.

"I hope my typewriter doesn't disturb you?"

"Not in the least."

He did ask her whether her fingers did not get very cold, and she flushed, and replied that she had a fire, only to realize that he did without a fire, and that he might think she was parading a pathetic sort of superiority.

"Oh, I have a fire—just—sometimes."

He did not appear interested in her fire, nor was he piqued by its symbolism.

"I sit in my overcoat."

He smiled with a suggestion of grimness. In fact, he was so absorbed in his work, and was so full of his own internal combustion, that he forgot other heats. He appeared to have no sex warmth in him at that period. Also, he was cultivating the indifference that becomes the lone man's coat, without realizing that so stiff and meagre a garment is apt to shrink in life's wash.

Watching his furious, cold, sedulous haste Ruth was most

strangely disappointed by it. She had her little fire and the warmth of her own nature, and she wanted a playmate. Those winter evenings were so dull, with the shops shut, and the gas lamps seen through fog or drizzle, and the sky like a wet black cushion pressing upon the tops of the houses. She was a warm-blooded creature and she was lonely, and she wanted a man, someone like Hazzard, who was not too fierce and terrifying in his passions, someone whose arm would slip round her easily. She wanted to be wanted. And they could have gone on little adventures together, spent sixpence apiece on gallery seats, or visited the Zoo on Saturday afternoons.

But it appeared that Hazzard wanted nothing but his work. He was too busy to be a lover, and when he ceased to be a student of medicine he became a fiddler or a waiter. Like a child she was distressed at not being noticed, for she was still very much a child, so she took refuge with Sally Sherman, and lavished herself on a woman instead of giving herself to a man. She and Sally would meet and go to a music-hall or a theatre, and on Saturdays and Sundays they were much together.

Sally was a great asker of questions.

"How's Mr. Sober-Sides?"

"Oh, he's always working for his examinations."

Ruth was a transparent creature, and it was easy for Sally to see through her friend's reservations. Obviously the student of medicine was neither a swashbuckler nor a sentimentalist. And one Saturday, being at Ruth's for tea and chatter, she met Hazzard on the stairs and had a good round look at him. He stood aside to let her pass. She was just a thing in petticoats going by. His male curiosity was so undeveloped that he did not even glance at her face to see whether she was pretty.

II

Sweeny, the chief porter at "Bennet's," had seen many students come and go, and Sweeny, being somewhat a man of the world who had on occasions to open doors for "royalty," knew a gentleman when he saw one. There were no flies upon Sweeny. He could be fierce and he could be gentle, a terror to importunate patients who spoke the Yiddish lingo, and very gallant to old women. To Moorhouse Sweeny's huge red face opened like a monstrous and welcoming flower. Soames and such splutterers were treated by the big Irishman with a masterful and half-truculent politeness, but it was upon Hazzard that Sweeny had

fixed a perplexed and critical blue eye. No eye can be more unfriendly than an Irishman's, but during the years of Hazzard's studentship, the blue glare of Sweeny's gaze became tempered and educated. He saw Mr. Moorhouse and Mr. Hazzard together, contrasts, extremes, two prophetic personalities, for it was one of Sweeny's superstitions that he could distinguish the gods that were to be from the members of the chorus.

Hazzard, passing in, wearing his shiny black overcoat, heard Sweeny's rolling, voluminous voice:

"Mr. Hazzard, sor."

Hazzard paused on the big brown mat. The door of the porter's office was made in two sections and the lower half had a shelf fitted to the top of it, and Sweeny was leaning over the shelf.

"The Dean left a message, sor. Will you be going to his room?"

"Now?"

"If you please, sor."

Hazzard went to the Dean's room, well aware of the fact that a summons to attend upon Dr. Platner was not as a rule a matter to be welcomed. Either you had been slacking, or cutting lectures, or making a nasty ass of yourself; but Christopher, having been guilty of none of these things, knocked at the Dean's door without any feeling of unpleasant curiosity.

A voice said "Come in," and the very pallid, hook-nosed face that was Dr. Platner's looked up from the desk. Platner had one of those heads that are shaped rather like a wedge, tapering to an edge that was nose and chin.

"Oh, Hazzard, just a few words."

He was an irritable man, abrupt, and inclined to sarcasm. His business was to supervise the careers of a number of young men, and he did not like young men.

"Sit down, Hazzard. Briefly—the business is this. There are about half a dozen third- and fourth-year men—hopeless duffers —who need coaching. It seemed to me—that you might be willing to take on the job."

He looked at Hazzard as though daring him to refuse, for to Dr. Platner duffers were an offence and an infliction, and his impulse was to rid himself of such sources of irritation.

"For fees, sir?"

"Of course. I would arrange that."

"How much time should I be expected to give?"

"Oh, a couple of hours a day, perhaps. You could spare the time—I imagine. You are so well forward."

Hazzard sat and stared at the top of Dr. Platner's desk. There were difficulties, and one very serious difficulty.

"And the question of the—room, sir?"

"Why not your own rooms?"

Hazzard's eyes looked straight into Dr. Platner's.

"I have a room. I live and work and sleep in it."

"Well, there is no reason why you should not use the small lecture room. It is not wanted after four o'clock."

"Thank you, sir. May I think it over?"

"Of course. But I want an early decision. All these fellows have been ploughed two or three times, and parents have been worrying me."

"If I let you know to-morrow, sir?"

"Certainly."

Hazzard went out of the Dean's room knowing that a singular and significant thing had happened, for he had been under the impression that Platner disliked him, and probably his impression had been accurate, for a man can remain unpopular while asserting his usefulness. In those few minutes much had passed through Hazzard's head; he saw the days of his servitude becoming bitter memories, the "Bunch of Grapes" left to dangle, the Fleet Street dinners done with. An expert coach could command good fees. As to his ability to teach he did not doubt it, for he was one of those individualists who had learnt to teach himself. But then—of course—those other fellows were thick-headed. He could pick them without Platner giving him the names; Sturgess, with his silly round face and big muscles, who led the hospital Rugby forwards; Evans—a little dandified fellow who was always involved with some woman or other; Bullard—yes—probably Bullard would be one of them. But Hazzard was discovering guile, the shrewd assumption of a calculated indifference. Platner should not be allowed to push the thing on him as he pleased.

Also, he had to confess that it was pleasant to roll the right of choice under his tongue, and to reserve to himself the exquisite prerogative of saying no. Also, he wished to ask Moorhouse's advice, for he was coming to find that Moorhouse in his indolent and easy way was something of a young sage, for Moorhouse knew things that Hazzard could not know.

The street lamps had been lit when Christopher walked round to Bernard Street, and a smirched sky was dropping sleet. Hazzard, with his coat collar turned up, and his gloveless hands in his pockets, did not pity himself because he felt the cold. He felt it because he had to sit in a stone-cold room, and because he had

not enough to eat, and he warmed himself before the fire of his own purpose. Standing on Moorhouse's doorstep and waiting for the door to open, he shivered and yet discovered an exquisite, fierce thrill in the tingling of his skin.

A maid opened the door.

"Mr. Moorhouse in?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll go up."

Moorhouse's rooms were on the first floor, the best set of rooms in the house, and though Hazzard did not grudge his friend his comfortable chairs, his Turkey carpet and his fire, he was acutely alive to the contrasts between Bernard Street and Roper's Row. The Moorhouses were people who had arrived, and in the inward sense, for their mental furniture was mellow and pleasant, and this very mellowness was to Christopher Hazzard an urge and an inspiration. He intended to have some of these good things, not so much for himself, or because they were of supreme importance, but because he wanted them for his mother and because he knew that the world respects nothing so much as evidence of material success. His acquisitive sense was ironic. His determination to possess was a gesture, part of his "I will."

Moorhouse was spread with a pipe and a book in front of a fire.

"Hallo! Come and squat."

Hazzard removed his overcoat, folded it carefully, and laid it across a chair. He had taken to a pipe since he had known Moorhouse, but he limited his smoking to three pipes of the mildest navy-cut per day. Also, his smoking made Moorhouse inwardly smile, for there was a certain primness about it.

"I want your opinion."

Moorhouse sat up. Hazzard, leaning forward in his chair, stared hard-eyed at the fire. Moorhouse had begun to notice that hardening of Hazzard's eyes.

"Platner has asked me to coach some of the duffers."

"Well—why not?"

"I'm not regarding it as a favour. Duffers are a nuisance to Platner, and to me—they may mean money."

"Well, take it on. Why not?"

He looked at his friend, and he looked at him with understanding. He had cause to feel that Hazzard was like a little man grimly climbing a stony hill, and that Hazzard's world was—of necessity—too stony.

It appeared that he had but two human strands attaching him to the world of the emotions, his devotion to his mother, and this

friendship that had grown up between them. Moorhouse's world was so much more lush and sunny.

"I told Platner I'd think it over."

"Why?"

"Largely—puckishness. But perhaps you wouldn't."

"Oh, yes, I should. There's pleasure to be derived from keeping some people waiting."

Hazzard smiled at the fire.

"That's it. The people who want to use you, not the people who need your help. Besides, I don't see anything very thrilling in trying to cram facts."

"Into Sturgess, Evans and Co."

"I suppose so."

"And Bullard—probably Bullard. Won't that pique you a little?"

"Would you care to coach Bullard?"

"My impulse would be to kick him. And metaphorically, Kit, you will be applying the toe of your superior intelligence."

Hazzard tore a strip of paper from Moorhouse's *Globe*, twisted it into a spill, and lit his pipe.

"Oh, yes, I shall take it on. I can manage the time. In fact—it will set me free—from other things. I shan't have to be quite so careful about matches."

He gave his friend an ironical and rallying glance.

"Realities. I have had to face life in my shirt."

III

Ruth Avery also had to face realities, but being what she was she attempted to dress them up like dolls in little odds and ends of sentiment. She shrank from life's nakedness, and naturally so, being no hybrid creature—half male and half female—but nine-tenths woman. She had little of Sally Sherman's masculinity. She asked for pretty pictures, and rosy lights, and flowers, and caressings and the chance to caress, and when Sally held forth on women's rights Ruth listened and was perplexed.

For she was Eve to Adam. She could not be sundered from her sex and its complement, and when Sally talked of rights, Ruth was thinking—or feeling—in terms of emotion. What rights had a woman as against a man or a child? And what rights had a man? Surely it was all nature, a part of creation.

But romantic creature that she was she had to invent alternatives for her realities as for the realities of the City and Roper's

Row. She ascribed Mr. George's googly, amorous interest to fatherliness. Or, if she could not find another name for a reality she drew a curtain and covered it up. Not that she was a complete coward, for when life with its inevitable fierce flashes involved her subsequently in a glare of reality she showed a courage—the almost desperate devotion of the woman creature when her mate or children are attacked. She was ready to throw herself under the wheels, instinctively. That was her right.

To Hazzard she was a pair of dark and watching eyes which he did not see. That, with his lame foot and his contrivings and his struggles, he made a peculiar appeal to her, was a reality that was not observed by him.

How was he to know that a frayed buttonhole and patched boots can rouse in a certain sort of woman ardent compassion, and that his very oddities provoke a tenderness that hovers between tears and laughter? He was engrossed in the collecting of information, physical data, observations of the human body when diseased. He was like a microscope that was focused on one small circle of light. Everything else was out of focus.

He did not realize his own self-absorption or the thickening shell of his hardness. A man does not realize that he is becoming a crustacean until life gives his shell a hammer blow. He saw what he was intended to see at that particular period of his career.

He was in and out of No. 7 Roper's Row like a dog entering and leaving its kennel. Mrs. Bunce was just Mrs. Bunce, a fat and bladder-like creature wearing spectacles, who floated on the dim edge of his consciousness. Ophelia was a mere turgid voice. He was working under pressure, absorbing physical data, and striving to impart information to a number of bored and dull young men. He was using his eyes and his hands and his ears, and was a creature, an intelligence behind the stethoscope and the ophthalmoscope and at the back of his sensitive fingers.

In fact, during the early part of December, Ruth had been shut up in her room for two days with a throat and a slight temperature before her illness became a reality to Hazzard. It was forced upon him by Phelia bumping into him on the stairs with a breakfast tray. The teapot discharged some of its contents through its spout.

"Oh, do be careful, Mr. 'Azzard."

"What's that?"

"Miss Avery's breakfast. She's been in bed two days."

He was vaguely surprised.

"I didn't know. Nothing serious?"

"No, nothink serious."

Ophelia was curt with him. He had caused her to stain the white cloth. And really he was a queer creature, an odd fish.

But Ruth reappeared on the fourth morning as the working girl off to the City and necessity, with a raw fog waiting for her in the streets. She looked rather colourless and pinched, and on the edge of a shiver. She and Hazzard met on the landing.

He was in a hurry, and his manner was awkward.

"Up again? That's right. Feeling better?"

Her dark eyes looked very large.

"Yes, much better, thank you."

"I'm glad."

And he hurried down the stairs ahead of her with the quick, hard heart-beats of his sedulous feet.

Chapter Eleven

I

Some two weeks later circumstance reversed the situation. There had been a fall of snow, and in London, snow, like other innocences, loses its virginity very quickly, and Ruth had tramped home from the City through a world of slush. She had lit her small fire and had taken off her wet shoes and put them to dry in the fender, but not too near to the fire—of course. Her stockings were wet, and she was peeling them off when she heard Hazzard's footsteps on the stairs. She noticed that he was coming up very slowly, and that he paused half-way up the last flight. And there he began to cough.

With one black stocking half on and half off she sat and listened, for his coughing was a dry and convulsive spasm that seemed to hold him gripped upon the stairs. It must have lasted a quarter of a minute, and when it passed she heard him climb the last few steps slowly and with obvious effort. He went into his room and closed the door. There was silence. Then she heard the faint creaking of a bed, and two thuds, the dropping of his boots upon the floor.

Her compassion put forth its flower, a dusky, perfumed thing, the very blossom that she was born to bear. She remembered that he had no fire, but what could she do but complete the stripping off of her wet stockings? The dye had run from them and stained her feet, and she fetched her basin and a small kettle, and heated up some water, and embracing her knees, sat round-backed, watching the fire. When the water had the chill off it she poured it into the basin that was on the floor, and with a cake of yellow soap and a rough towel, set about her cleansing.

She heard Hazzard coughing, and it occurred to her compassion to picture him as wet and chilled. He had nothing but that wretched oil-stove, but she could not ask him to share her fire. And yet—why not? But no. And having dried her feet, and slipped on a pair of stockings and put on a pair of red slippers, she stood hesitant and wondering. A fire was such an intimate thing, almost as intimate as a bed, and yet her impulses disturbed her. She made a sudden movement, and opening her door, crossed the landing. Again that hard dry cough. She knocked gently at Hazzard's door.

"Mr. Hazzard."

A silence seemed to tighten itself, and she waited, wondering whether he would open the door.

"Mr. Hazzard."

"Yes."

"My kettle is nearly boiling. If you would care for some hot tea."

"Thank you. I've gone to bed. A bit chilled. Thanks—all the same."

But she did not feel herself repulsed, and half an hour later, when she had made her own tea and boiled the solitary egg for her supper, she filled a cup, and putting a couple of pieces of sugar in the saucer, placed her offering outside Hazzard's door. She tapped gently with her fingers.

"I have put a cup of tea outside."

"Oh, thanks. Very good of you."

His voice sounded distressed.

"Don't think I'll risk getting out."

She tried the handle and found that the door was not locked. She hesitated and then opened the door an inch, and saw that the room was in darkness. Her impulse expressed itself silently. Picking up the cup, and with a vague whiteness of the bed-spread to guide her, she placed the cup beside the bed, and swiftly and without a word, closed the door and returned to her own room.

II

Ruth blew out her candle about ten o'clock, but she lay awake listening to the voices in Roper's Row, and to the sound of Hazzard coughing. Dry and ringing, it seemed to her that the cough hurt him, and that he tried to control it, for there would be a smothering silence between the spasms as though he were holding his breath. It made her feel very wakeful and distressed, for she knew that he must be awake, and perhaps in pain, and the darkness of her own room made her more alert and sensitive.

But presently the coughing ceased. She had been on the point of getting out of bed and going to his door with the idea of asking him whether she could do anything or call up Mrs. Bunce. She lay on her back and listened, and began to think that he had fallen asleep, and the suggestion of sleep was self-persuading. Her eyes closed; she dozed off.

Ruth woke just before dawn. The window was still dark, and for the moment she had no inkling as to the hour, but from Hazzard's room came that dry, hard cough.

She groped for the matches and lit the candle on the chair be-

side her bed. Her watch lay there, and she found that the time was ten minutes to seven. She heard voices in the Row, and slipping swiftly out of bed, she began to dress, for somehow her consciousness contained a summons. She was quite sure that Hazzard was ill. She hurried. She bundled up her mass of black hair, and with quick, tremulous fingers tucked in the pins. She listened for sounds from the other room.

Dressed, she opened the door, and crept across the landing on stockinged feet. She listened. She could hear a sound of breathing, a queer, distressful sound as though the man in the bed was both afraid to breathe because it hurt him, and was also hungry for air. The sound expressed anxiety, and its very anxiousness was communicated to her.

She knocked.

"Mr. Hazzard."

"Yes."

"You're ill. What must I do?"

His voice came to her huskily:

"I'm afraid—I am. It's very good—of you. I've got a friend in Bernard Street—No. 17. Moorhouse is the name."

She said, "I'll go."

Not waiting to put on a hat, but slipping into her shoes and a coat she hurried down the stairs. Ophelia was unbolting the street door, hair in curl-papers, nose pinched and blue, and sniffling, for, as she put it, "I'm always moist of a mornin'." Roper's Row looked grey and dastardly, and Ophelia, using the back of a red hand, shook her cheeks and blubbered.

"Blimy, ain't it cold! You—are—early!"

"Yes, I am rather early."

Ruth left the girl perplexed upon the doorstep, and went swiftly down the Row into Red Lion Street. It was one of those mornings when the day's breath is like frozen spittle on an old man's beard. Slush filled the gutters, and in Red Lion Street Ruth took to her heels and ran. A milkman, flapping an arm across his chest, and carrying the can as though the handle was too hot to hold, gave her a glad eye.

"That'll warm your tootsies, Miss."

She sailed past him without a glance or a word. The casual common male offended her, perhaps because she was prepared to dream of princes and gentlemen in armour. Guilford Place spread its cobbles, and across the way the Foundling Hospital looked distant and dim in the grey of the morning. Guilford Street had many of its windows alight. She cut across and through into

Bernard Street, the haste gone from her as she glanced decorously at the brass numerals. She came to No. 17. It had a prosperous, Prussian blue door.

The woman who answered the bell appeared to regard the whole world with suspicion. No. 17 was a respectable house, a house with a true blue door and modest lace curtains.

"What is it?"

She disapproved of Ruth's hatless head, and of her quick colour and her air of haste.

"Does Mr. Moorhouse live here?"

"What's your business?"

"Oh, I've brought a message from a friend of Mr. Moorhouse's. He's ill—the friend, I mean—and would Mr. Moorhouse come and see him?"

"I'll give Mr. Moorhouse the message. What address?"

"Mr. Hazzard, No. 7 Roper's Row."

The woman was preparing to close the door.

"Oh, and will you ask him to come at once?"

"I'll give Mr. Moorhouse the message. He's in his bath at present."

Ruth returned to Roper's Row, and seeing Ophelia taking down the black shutters, and her mother busy in the shop sorting papers under a gas-jet, she went in to explain the situation.

"I'm afraid Mr. Hazzard's ill."

Mrs. Bunce's spectacles registered surprise and alarm.

"Ill? How d'you know?"

"He spoke to me from his room, and asked me to fetch a friend of his. I've just been."

"Lorks!" said the lady. "I 'opes it's nothink catching."

But she was a good soul and she followed Ruth up the stairs and knocked at Christopher's door.

"Mr. 'Azzard, I 'ope it's nothink serious."

She was answered by a spasm of coughing, and glancing at Ruth who stood beside her, she pulled an expressive face.

"That's an 'orrid cough.—Mr. 'Azzard, Miss Avery's just been and told a friend of yours."

And Hazzard, emerging from the spasm, and from a series of knife thrusts in the side, gasped out a reply.

"Thanks. That's all right. Is—Mr. Moorhouse coming?"

Ruth reassured him.

"Yes, I left a message asking him to come at once."

Mrs. Bunce returned to the sorting of her papers, for to Mrs. Bunce life was a succession of worries. It resembled an attempt to tot up a column full of odd pennies and farthings while somebody

talked to you and at you without ceasing. Mrs. Bunce had the compressed lips and the frown of a woman who was always trying to do three separate things at once; she was both dispersed and concentrated. She blew her nose under the gas-jet, and snapped at her daughter.

"Can't you keep that door shut? A draught up my legs always gives me the rheumatics. 'E's got an 'orrid cough, 'e 'as. I do 'ate doctors about a place."

Ophelia looked moist and depressed.

"Poor fellah. You ain't very sympathetic."

"Yes, I am. But I'm that bothered. And what between botherin' and sympathizin'—and me 'ands feelin' like cold suet. Drat it, you 'aven't shut that door."

Ruth sat on her bed and waited. Her breakfast was a Bunce affair and would be produced at Ophelia's pleasure, but this sudden illness of Hazzard's was a thing that happened of itself, and things that happened of themselves were all too rare in Ruth's life. She was like a little clockwork toy that tottered to and fro between Roper's Row and the office of Messrs. Fogson & George in Moorgate Street, and on this raw morning the rhythm of her routine would be broken. Her dash for help had been an adventure. Also, she knew that in all probability she would be late at the office, but she thought that Mr. George's fatherliness would cause him to overlook the offence. Moreover, her excuse was a good one.

Meanwhile she sat and waited for the coming of Moorhouse, and wondered in her simple way what Mr. Moorhouse would be like, and whether Hazzard was dangerously ill. She felt involved in his illness. She wanted to help, not because she saw herself in the part of the ministering angel, but because there was something in her that was "woman" to Hazzard's "man."

Ophelia, arriving with the breakfast tray, and having deposited it on Ruth's table, stood in the doorway, and listened to one of those spasms of coughing.

"Oo-er, did you 'ear 'im groan, Miss?"

Ruth sat down at the table. She disapproved of Ophelia as an emotional creature, because Ophelia's emotions were moist and wore curl-papers, and lacked perfume.

"No. You need not shut the door."

"No, Miss."

"I want to speak to Mr. Hazzard's friend. He should be here very soon."

Ruth had just finished her breakfast when she heard footsteps on the stairs. They were a man's footsteps, and she opened her

door and stood waiting for Christopher's friend, and when she saw him the unexpectedness of him made of her femininity a dark mirror. The woman had said that Mr. Moorhouse was in his bath, and to Ruth he had the air of having come straight from a world of other cleanliness, a blond, blue thing with a kind of bloom upon him. He stood there at the head of the stairs in the light from her open door, and they looked at each other and were mutually aware of each other as creatures well worth looking at. Moorhouse's eyes exclaimed, "You pretty thing," but the exclamation was softly muted.

He said, "Good morning. Was it you?"

She nodded her dark head at him.

"Yes. I'm afraid. You see—I heard Mr. Hazzard coughing."

Her use of the "Mr." gave her position in the picture, and Moorhouse thought, "Some of these shop-girls are quite exquisite. She's like a gentle, dark pansy," and he said, "I came round at once. Hazzard's been overworking himself. I'll go in."

He gave her a smile, the kind of smile that working girls who have looks rarely receive from a man. It was the kind of smile that a youngster like Moorhouse might give to a pretty kid of a sister, and it entered into Ruth and remained with her while she waited in her room. She was very susceptible to beauty, but in those strange stirrings of tenderness that carry man and woman into other worlds beauty may be no more than a beating of the wings. Ruth was aware of Moorhouse as Moorhouse, but she was still more aware of Hazzard's dark and defiant head, and of all those qualities that were associated with him, overwork, a fireless room, semi-starvation, an indomitable, intent aloofness.

His door had closed on Moorhouse, and she stood at her window and waited. The window-box of the young people across the way had no flowers in it. She heard voices, movements, a spasm of coughing. She remembered that she would be late at the office, and she did not care.

When Hazzard's door opened she turned quickly and went to meet Moorhouse on the landing. Her attitude was almost that of a woman who felt herself responsible. Moorhouse closed the door.

"I'm afraid it looks serious."

"Oh, don't say that."

She became poignant, and there was a part of Moorhouse that instantly desired to kiss the poignant mouth.

"Well, I'm not an expert, but it looks to me like a bad chest. I'm going straight on to the hospital. I'll bring someone back."

Her eyes said, "How good of you," and Moorhouse smiled at her, and his smile was a young man's benediction. She was as surprising to him as he had been to her. He had not known of her existence, or that Hazzard had in the room across the landing a little, smoky-lashed friend whose colour came and went and who breathed like a warm-blooded bird.

"Is there anything I can do?"

He considered.

"Some warm milk. But, look here, will you be scared?"

"Why, of what?"

"Oh, well, that's all right. I'll get off at once."

She watched him go down the stairs with that swift, easy floating movement of his, as though he had wings, and she thought him a rather wonderful person, but he was not Christopher Hazzard, a sick man in a fireless room, a man who needed warm milk. She hurried downstairs in search of milk and a fire; she invaded the Bunce kitchen; her compassion and her urgency communicated themselves to the other women. Milk and a saucepan were forthcoming.

"Oh, dear, it's to be the doctor, is it? Pore young fellow. Him with no fire. I always did say 'e didn't eat enough to keep a mouse alive."

Ruth, dark and intent, full-lipped and pansy-eyed as a Rossetti woman, stood bending and watching the saucepan.

"It's his chest—I'm afraid."

"Dear, dear. I suppose 'is mother will 'ave to be sent for. Now, 'ow'll I manage?"

Said Ruth musingly, "If she comes she can have my room. I'll get a room out."

She tested the milk's temperature with the tip of a little finger, and filling the glass that Mrs. Bunce provided, went unquestioned up the stairs. Not that mother and daughter did not look at each other meaningly for a moment. She knocked at Hazzard's door.

"Here's some hot milk. May I come in?"

She did not wait for his answer, but entered, to find him in a crouching attitude, lying upon his side, the pillow crumpled under him. His face was flushed, his eyes curiously bright. He looked up at her with an air of clouded anguish. She noticed his breathing, a short, catching movement of the chest.

She said, "Forgive me for coming in. Mr. Moorhouse said you might like this."

He was mute, and bending over him with the glass, she persuaded him to drink.

"Do try."

"I—can't move. Breathing hurts."

"Let me help."

She tried to raise his head and shoulders, but when he attempted to drink, the milk dribbled down his chin.

"Sorry—can't manage it. Ought to have a feeding-cup."

He lay back and that wincing breathing went on, and she stood holding the glass and looking poignant.

"Of course. A teapot would do."

She dashed downstairs to put the inspiration into action, and returning to his room, found that her ingenuity was rewarded. Helped by her he was able to drink from the spout of the teapot. And she was still feeding him when Moorhouse and an older man entered the room.

III

At Melfont the post office occupied a portion of the village shop, and when a telegram came in and young Clara Dummet had written it out, her mother had to see it, for Mrs. Dummet was not only an autocrat, but also insatiably inquisitive. If the telegram contained anything of local interest, and one of Mrs. Dummet's familiars happened to be in the shop, the news would be communicated, and perhaps discussed.

"Toller's girl has had a baby."

"What, the one as married Tod's bailiff and went to live at Weybourne?"

"Yes, the little fat one."

"Why, they were only married last March."

"Time enough."

So, it came about that Sarah Prosser, who happened to be in the village shop buying groceries about the time that the telegram to Mary Hazzard arrived, heard of Christopher's illness before the news of it reached his mother.

Mrs. Prosser was pleased.

"There now, didn't I always say London would eat him up? A little sickly chap. Looks serious, doesn't it? What do they say, 'Come at once.'"

Mrs. Dummet handed the telegram back to her daughter, who folded it up and placed it in an envelope.

"Yes, come at once. You had better send young Tom off on his bike, Clara."

And so the message went.

IV

In winter the green top of Sisbury had more meaning for Mary Hazzard than during the other seasons, for the unfrequent sunlight of December or of January seemed to shine more often upon the rounded summit of the hill. There were moments when it looked all gold. Or it would be green against blue, or a blackness in the midst of the sunset, and even on grey days it caught more light than did the valley. Sisbury's moods were Mary's moods. She had lived under and near the hill for so many years that she knew it better than she knew any human face. And it was a face to her, a friendly countenance, a presence.

Standing at the back door with that telegram in her hands, lips suddenly pale and compressed, her eyes at gaze over the boy's head, she looked up at Sisbury.

"No,—no answer."

She remained standing there after the boy had mounted his bicycle and disappeared up the lane. She looked at Sisbury. It so happened that the sun was shining upon it, and the sky was blue, and the great green slopes had a gentleness. Her dark eyes gazed and gazed, they seemed to question the hill, to absorb something from it.

Her face, tragic while reading the telegram, grew resolute. She was needed and she would go, but she would go with the knowledge that the sun was shining upon Sisbury. She and the great hill understood each other. Up in its green face she saw foreshadowings.

She folded up the telegram. Someone had appeared suddenly at the gate, a stout person who had been hurrying on fat legs.

"They do say you've bad news, Mary."

Kit's mother looked at the Prosser face hanging like a red round of beef above the slats of the gate.

"Ah—do they?"

"Didn't I always say that a little delicate chap like young Christopher——? I hope it isn't as serious as it sounds."

Mary looked from the Prosser face to Sisbury.

"It isn't as serious as you'd like it to be, Sarah."

She closed the door, and stood for a moment at the window. Mrs. Prosser had plodded on, carrying her string-bag and a load of malice. And once more Mary Hazzard's eyes raised themselves to the sunlit summit of the hill.

She had a most strange feeling. It was as though Sisbury spoke to her. "Look at me, woman, for the last time. I stay, you go."

Chapter Twelve

I

Moorhouse met Christopher's mother at Paddington, and it so happened that when the train drew up Mary Hazzard's third-class compartment was opposite the spot where Moorhouse was standing. He saw her at the window, and he knew her at once by her height and her straightness, but chiefly by her large and striking eyes. He opened the carriage door and took her black bag from her.

"Mrs. Hazzard."

She carried her load of suspense as Sisbury carried the sky.

"It was good of you to come, Mr. Moorhouse. And the news——?"

His blue eyes looked into her dark ones, and he realized that to this woman you spoke the truth, for anything less than the truth would have been an affront to her courage.

"Pneumonia—I'm afraid."

"I had a feeling."

"Dr. Pearson, the Medical Registrar at 'Bennet's,' is in charge. Couldn't have a sounder man. And we have moved him into the other room."

"Miss Avery's room?"

"Yes; she was very decent about it, offered it at once. She has got a room elsewhere."

Moorhouse put her into a four-wheeler, and she sat erect, with hands folded in her lap. She said little, but watched the traffic and the houses with her still, dark eyes. She seemed to look beyond natural things, and Moorhouse—the gentleman—left her to her silences. His impression of her was of a woman with immense courage who was advancing on death—not with tears and supplication—but with the will to defeat death. He felt her extraordinary, tense calmness, and respected it.

Presently she spoke.

"Mr. Moorhouse, you know my son. You are his friend. You may know things that I do not know."

"What things?"

"It has been a struggle for both of us. I've wondered—often—whether he has had enough to eat."

And Moorhouse considered and lied.

"Oh, I think so. Of course—he works like a Trojan. Besides—he has been earning fees as a coach. This might have happened to anyone, you know."

She moved her hands, changing their position in her lap.

"Yes,—but to my son. In a few months—he would have been qualified. But he will be. I don't give up, Mr. Moorhouse."

He said with feeling, "I think you are splendid."

Again there was silence, but when the cab was rounding Russell Square, Moorhouse relieved himself of something that had been on his mind.

"Mrs. Hazzard, I should like to help. You'll understand me. Kit will need a nurse."

She laid a hand for a moment on his sleeve.

"Thank you, my dear, but I shall be the nurse."

"Yes, but night and day, Mrs. Hazzard?"

"Can any paid woman give what I can give?"

He was silent.

But she allowed him to pay for the cab, and there was grace between them, and Moorhouse carried her bag to the door of No. 7.

"I'll come up for a moment. You might want to send me for something."

She went straight up the steep, dark stairs, and on the landing she came upon Ruth Avery on her knees hurrying the last of her belongings into her portmanteau. The girl turned and rose, and her eyes were on Hazzard's mother.

"Oh, Mrs. Hazzard."

"Yes."

"I've cleared all my things."

Dark-eyed women both of them, each with an inner richness of texture that differed in its temper, something drew them from the first glance.

"Thank you, my dear. It is very good of you."

"Oh, it's nothing. His room is to be yours. They have moved him into mine."

So, Mary Hazzard entered her son's room, and stood a moment looking about her, and then calmly took off her hat and coat, and smoothed her hair before her son's glass. Ruth was closing her portmanteau, and Moorhouse, halted at the top of the stairs, offered to strap it for her, and did so.

"Can I carry it for you?"

"Oh, thank you so much. Just down the stairs. I've got a room at No. 21, and a man's coming."

Moorhouse shouldered the portmanteau, and he was half way down the stairs when Mary Hazzard came out of her son's room and crossed the landing to enter Ruth's. The girl, leaning against the stair rail, held out a sudden impulsive hand.

"Oh, I do hope—I'm sure—he will get well."

And Mary Hazzard paused, and with a white dignity, kissed her.

Moorhouse, reclimbing the stairs and passing a Ruth who hurried by with a wetness of the eyes, heard the voice of Hazzard's mother calling to him softly.

"Mr. Moorhouse."

He went up.

"Yes, something I can do?"

"There's a man singing over the way. I wonder if you would go to the house and ask him to stop."

"Of course."

Moorhouse descended into Roper's Row, and stood to locate the voice and the house. It was the voice of the gay fellow bawling his favourite refrain—

> "Nothing to do but die, nothing to do but die,
> When you've come to the end of your days
> There's nothing to do but die."

II

Mary Hazzard was a woman of silences. Had she been asked to smooth out the raw, red world she would have made it as silent as Sisbury. The singing of birds she would have welcomed, and the rumble of a wagon, and the distant voices of children playing, but like most sensitives—had she had the power—she would have imposed upon most of humanity a dumbness. For seeing that most common voices are both ugly and fatuous, and that Roper's Row was full of such voices, discords were lavish and inevitable. Yet, she was not to see and hear the world as her son was to see and hear it, as an increasing confusion and hideousness and hubbub, for the twentieth century was to be the century of discords, the age of dreadful noise and of a people most strangely deaf to their own disharmonies.

So, Roper's Row was noisy, and the top sash of the window had to be kept open for the sake of air, and the mother, watching like life beside the son's bed, and fearing that any jarring of the balance might turn the beam in favour of the scale in which death lay, set her soul and her face against those discords. They should

not disturb him by disturbing her. The little, panting, bright-eyed figure in the bed was like a candle flame to be screened and watched. She willed into herself and into that room a tranquillity, a spiritual silence.

Kit had pneumonia, acute lobar pneumonia, with its crisis due at the end of seven days, and Mary Hazzard sat down to confront those seven days.

How often had the world said to her, "You'll never make a man of that child," and, like the Prosser woman, waited to say, "I told you so." But between the making of a man and the breeding of young bullocks there is a difference, all the difference between genius and garbage, between Christ and Karl Marx. She saw her son propped up on his pillows, flushed, perspiring, and with little shallow pantings running his race with death. Presumably she saw herself crucified in the body of her son, but at the foot of her mother's cross there was no weeping Mary.

Pearson, the Medical Registrar at "Bennet's," sandy, round-headed, with a solemn, deep voice, and thorough through and through, tried to persuade her to have a nurse.

"You know, Mrs. Hazzard, it is a question of nursing in a case like this."

She agreed with him.

"That's why I am here."

"But—day and night—for a week or more?"

"I can doze in my chair. And I get an hour or two on my bed in the afternoon. I had to nurse his father, Dr. Pearson, and I lost him. I am not going to lose my son."

"But if you knock yourself up?"

"It won't matter. I'm ending; he's beginning."

She had had her justification, for though Kit's temperature climbed, and his consciousness was at times chaotic with cloudy phantasms, that same consciousness was full of his mother's presence. He watched her. He seemed to be soothed by her nearness. She sustained him, and she knew it, for he was like a child lying there, comforted and encouraged by the feel and the sight of her. She was there with hands to raise him up, and to administer those frequent nourishments, milk and meat essence, and a little brandy. Bending over the bed she would feed him with a spoon just as she had fed him when he had been ill as a child.

But he, bemused, burning, poisoned, was not so drugged by the toxin as to forget that his mother was human. He would look at her with huge, lustrous eyes.

"Go and get a rest. I'm all right."

His voice, breathless and husky, had its murmur of courage.

"I'm all right. Go and lie down."

He wished it. She knew that he would be worried and distressed unless she humoured him, and she would steal out of the room now and again, and sit at the window of the back room, or lie down on the bed. It was very cold in this room, but she did not appear to feel the cold. Also, she had made the discovery that her son's room was not as it had been when she had come up for Bennet's Day, and she drew her own conclusions and hid them in her heart. Probably he had sold some of the furniture to pay hospital fees. He had been sending her money. She had put it away in the Melfont bank, not for herself, but for him.

Moorhouse climbed the stairs twice a day, and looked at her as he would have looked at his own mother.

"Pearson's quite pleased. And he's not the man for soft soap."

"Yes, he will pull through, Mr. Moorhouse."

She was uncannily confident, with her bright pallor and the dark set of her sure eyes.

"I've got to thank you for all the things you sent."

"Oh, that's nothing."

For Moorhouse would buttonhole Dr. Pearson, and having learnt from him all that was needed, go to the chemist's in Lamb's Conduit Street, and order medicines and meat essences, and pay for them.

"And what about you, Mrs. Hazzard?"

She would smile at him.

"Well, what about me? Do I look ill?"

At the end of the third day he thought that she appeared desperately tired. Her skin looked like vellum drawn tight. She had smudges under her eyes, but the eyes themselves seemed to have a fire burning behind them. She was strung up, inspired.

"Why not have some help?"

"I can manage. They are being very kind. Mrs. Bunce offered to sit up. People are kind."

"That fellow hasn't been bawling again?"

"No."

Moorhouse thought her magnificent. His young homage had to express itself. He went out and bought her hot-house roses.

III

Ruth, too, came twice a day, on her way to and from the City. She did not ask questions. She would stand and look at Mary Hazzard with her smoky, poignant eyes.

"Going on very well, my dear."

There had been instant sympathy between these two women, for Ruth was silent and shy, a girl who could listen and wait, not one to put herself forward or to suggest that she had any right to be interested. She saw even more than Moorhouse did, for she saw with the eyes of a woman.

"I've got half Saturday and Sunday free, Mrs. Hazzard."

"Well, my dear."

"You haven't been out of the house. Why don't you let me sit in the room, or just outside the door? You could go to bed and get some sleep. I'd be very quiet. I know when not to talk."

Mrs. Hazzard kissed her.

"Then—you know what most people never learn. I'll think it over."

"To-morrow's Saturday."

"Yes, it is. And Monday's the seventh day. I want to be strong for the crisis."

That night, sitting beside Christopher's bed, Mary Hazzard was made to realize that her will power was not limitless. Kit's temperature was high, and he was restless and rambling, and his delirium seemed to affect her, and to impose upon her tired senses grotesque hallucinations. The lamp was shaded, the curtains drawn. It was a still and foggy night, and as she sat facing the window she saw the curtains sway and belly out as though someone had opened the door of the room. She looked and looked, and the curtains hung straight, for there was no wind, and yet she could have sworn to the movement. Also, there were other phantasies, and she thought, "I'm getting jumpy. It won't do. I must be strong for Monday. I want a walk and six hours' sleep." So, when Ruth climbed the stairs of No. 7 on the Saturday morning, Mary Hazzard was listening and went out to meet her on the landing.

"I've been thinking it over. Are you still of the same mind?"

"Then—I may? I'll be here by half-past one."

"Thank you, my dear. I want to be strong for Monday."

"Supposing I take charge from two till midnight? Or, I'll sit up. Why not? Let me sit up Sunday night?"

"But you have work on Monday."

"Oh, Monday—everyone feels sleepy and dull on Monday. Do let me help. And you will get a good night's rest."

"I think I will let you do it, my dear."

So it was arranged between them, and on the Sunday Ruth took Mary Hazzard's place, and Hazzard did not seem to notice the

change. He lay there propped up, with his bright eyes and flushed cheeks, busy with nothing but breathing, drowsy and stupid with fever. Ruth sat down in her own arm-chair by the fire so that she could watch the bed without her vigil being too obvious. She had a sense of strangeness in the midst of those most familiar surroundings, with Christopher lying in her bed, and she watching him in the intimate silence.

She had the shaded lamp behind her, for the gas was too glaring, and a book to read, and the fire to look to. The sounds from the Row, such as they were on a Sunday night, seemed deadened by the fog. It was a winter of perpetual fog. Her book lay in her lap, a mere accessory, for the book of her self was open for her to read. She was feeling responsible, and her sleek, warm compassion sat by the fire and felt strangely satisfied and wakeful, for there were things to be remembered. She was to see that Hazzard did not slip down in the bed; she was to be ready should he need her; every hour he was to be given a little egg albumen or meat essence, but she was not to disturb him if he slept.

She kept still as a cat. Looking at him she was aware of his extreme thinness; he was thin enough at all times, but in a week he seemed to have become a hectic, emaciated shell. His nose looked all point and nostrils, and she could see the nostrils moving and the neck muscles working in his hunger for air. Occasionally he moved his head, and when it lay in a certain position she saw the shadow of it on the wall, a sharp profile with the nose like a beak. His cheek-bones protruded under patches of bright red skin. His forehead glistened. A scent as of warm flannel seemed to pervade the room.

Sickness can be a sordid affair, a matter of foul breath and cracked lips and a smell of sweat, and Ruth was a fastidious creature, but Hazzard's panting body roused in her nothing but pity. It was the supreme test, though she was not conscious of it in that way. She sat and watched and wondered. He had been so aloof and silent and self-sufficient, and now he was so helpless. There was a part of her that exulted in his helplessness. She wondered whether it would make a difference.

She thought, too, of his mother. Did he realize, did any man realize? And then she became aware of the fire as needing her attention. She observed Hazzard for a moment; his eyes were closed; he appeared to be asleep. Very softly she got down on her knees and, using her fingers, put coal on the fire, lump by lump. The black dust stained her fingers, and to save movement and splashings she was constrained to wipe her fingers on her black skirt.

"Thirsty, Mother."

She turned on her knees. His eyes were open and he was gazing at her, and his eyes looked huge and glassy. She got up, and went to the little table near the bed, and poured a little barley-water into the feeding-cup.

"Yes, here's something to drink."

Bending over him she raised his head with one hand, and held the spout of the feeding-cup to his lips, and he drank a little and then lay back. His glassy eyes were intent yet puzzled.

"Where's—my mother?"

"Resting."

It was obvious that he did not recognize her, and somehow—she was shocked.

"Who're you? Nurse?"

"Yes, to-night, I am the nurse. Now, you mustn't talk."

He lay relaxed upon his pillows, and his quick, shallow breathing went on.

IV

But none of her helpers and sympathizers realized all that Mary Hazzard gave to her son during those seven days. She spent herself, all that was left of her strength and her courage. She was sustained by her indomitable purpose. She sat beside her son's bed and willed him to live, and with her indefatigable hands put her purpose into action. She was like a snow figure refusing to melt in the sun, and Moorhouse and Ruth, and Dr. Pearson and the Bunces saw her as a woman deliberate and calm with dark eyes in a face of deadly whiteness. She showed no sign of faltering. She endured, because endurance was the soul of the last great act.

On that critical seventh day she entered her son's room at seven in the morning to find Ruth sitting by the fire and looking all eyes. She had managed to keep awake. Mrs. Mary kissed her, and spoke in a whisper.

"My dear, you ought to go to bed."

"Oh, I shall be all right. It will do me good to walk to the City. He has slept quite a lot, Mrs. Hazzard."

When Ruth had gone, looking rather like a little tired bird with her feathers ruffled, Mary Hazzard bent over her son's bed. He was awake and it seemed to her that his breathing was easier.

"Had a good night, Kit?"

He could smile at her.

"I'm better."

That smile of his was like the raising of a curtain. She had slept; she felt that she had the strength to endure through the seventh day, though she knew that her strength was near its end. How she had counted the days, like a runner counting the miles. She sat down by the fire, and held her hands to it. She was cold, very cold, and she did not wish to touch her son with cold hands.

Dr. Pearson, coming up with Moorhouse at half-past nine, found her sitting beside Christopher's bed with a white sheen on her face. She said, "He is better."

Pearson, after using eyes and fingers and ears, got up from his chair with an air of quiet briskness, and waved Mary Hazzard out on to the landing where Moorhouse was waiting. He closed the door.

"Yes, it's come. He's much better. Pulse down and steadier, temperature down too."

Her tall figure was motionless and rigid. She dared not let herself go.

"Thank God."

"I think the worst's over."

"You've been so good and kind."

The two men looked at her with a kind of sacred shyness.

"It has been a pleasure."

Moorhouse was more explicit.

"Your victory, Mrs. Hazzard."

They seemed to understand that she wished to be left alone, that she could not bear much emotion, but Pearson turned at the top of the stairs.

"I think you might consider yourself a little now. Go and lie down."

They saw the ghost of a smile.

"No. I shall sit with him till to-night."

V

Ruth, hurrying up the stairs of No. 7 at half-past eight, on her way to the City, found herself standing upon the landing in the midst of a dim silence. Both doors were shut, and as she hesitated between them, she heard Hazzard's voice weak but clear.

"Mother," it called, "Mother."

And a strange thrill passed through Ruth's body, a vibration that had in it something tragic, the trembling of a presentiment. She stood very still for a moment. Then she went very softly to Mary Hazzard's door and knocked.

There was no response.

"Mrs. Hazzard."

She whispered the name, with her face very close to the door, and when no answer came she turned the handle, and finding the door unlocked, opened it an inch.

"Mrs. Hazzard. Christopher is——"

The words died away. Through the slit of the opening she could see the bed, and Mary Hazzard lying there with her hands crossed upon the quilt. The figure had a stillness, the calm of finality, and Ruth held her breath.

Frightened, she slipped into the room, and touched one of Mary Hazzard's hands. It was cold.

She drew back, stricken, shocked, to hear the voice in the other room calling like the voice of a child.

"Mother,—Mother."

She was shaking at the knees, but she kept her head. She felt that he must not be allowed to know, at least—not yet. Swaying slightly as she walked, she crossed the landing, and opened Christopher's door.

"Your mother is asleep."

"Is she? Don't wake her. I'm all right."

"I'm here. I shall be here all day."

"It's very good of you. She must be so tired."

Her courage and her pity conquered her tremblings.

"I'm just going downstairs. I'll be back in a moment."

She remembered that she had left the other door ajar, and she closed it, and then went downstairs, and with eyes that were all dim in a stark little face, told Mrs. Bunce the news.

Mrs. Bunce put her hands up, and was voiceless.

"I'm going up to sit with him. He mustn't know yet. It might be too much of a shock. Will you tell the doctor and Mr. Moorhouse when they come?"

Chapter Thirteen

I

HAZZARD did not know until next day, and it was Moorhouse who told him.

"She lay down to sleep, old chap, when she knew that all was well with you. And she did not wake up."

Hazzard, with his thin face sunk deep in the white trough of the pillow, neither moved nor spoke; and Moorhouse, standing at the window, waited for that silence to break as a man waits for a pistol-shot or a cry of pain, but the silence continued. In fact it ceased to express a sense of unbearable tension, and became a void, an inarticulate emptiness.

"Do you mean to say that my mother is dead, Moorhouse?"

"Yes, she died in her sleep."

Moorhouse got himself out of the room and sat down on the top of the stairs just like a boy in trouble, for in Hazzard's room the silence that had followed question and answer was not to be borne. The door was closed on something torn and incredulous and mute and quivering. And damn it, what could a man say? What was there to be said?

Moorhouse, sitting on the stairs, and facing the age-old emptiness, heard footsteps coming up, and below him in the gloom of the well Ruth's flowerlike face floated. She was wearing black, and everything was black about her save the white corolla and calyx of face and throat, and to Moorhouse's fancy she was life and youth rising in the raw light of that pitiless morning. He stood up, and she, pausing half-way up the last flight, spoke softly:

"Have you told him yet?"

Moorhouse answered her with a movement of the head, and she made a sighing sound and leaned against the rail.

"Isn't it strange? I couldn't go to the City. Besides, he's so helpless."

"Absolutely."

"What's to be done?"

She looked at him as though he would know what was to be done and how to do it, but though the necessities were obvious they were new to him. These bleak necessities! What did one do when a woman died in her sleep a hundred miles or so from her

home, and her son was helpless, and money a problem, a death certificate doubtful? But with Moorhouse, his seeming slowness was like his gaze, deliberate and far-sighted. He had the eyes of a countryman.

He said, "Oh, there's a lot to arrange. I shall have to talk to him. The 'Bennet's' people will help. Probably I shall have to rush down to Melfont."

She looked at him like a trusting child.

"Yes, she would have liked to go home. We must save him all we can."

She, too, sat down on the stairs, and was aware of those two closed doors, and two differing silences. She was with both. She had come to assume in these few hours a consciousness of intimate association, the privilege of her emotions, the right to feel and think in the presence of Hazzard's helplessness. Probably she did not realize how deeply her assumptions committed her. She looked up at Moorhouse, who, with his back to the wall, appeared to be staring at the projection of his own thoughts.

"Things happen so quickly, don't they?"

Her voice roused him, and with a glance and a movement of the head, he went towards Hazzard's door, and vanished into the room, and Ruth, with her dark head resting against the banisters, listened to the two voices, Moorhouse's gentle and deliberate, Hazzard's like the dull edge of a blunted knife. Some five minutes passed, and then Moorhouse came out with a face that had assumed an expression of wilful solidity. He had his hands in his pockets.

"I think I can manage now. I'm going first to see Pearson and the Dean, and wire to the lawyer at Melfont. I shall have a busy day."

She stood up with an air of belonging.

"I shall be here. You can send any messages to me. And I can see anyone you send."

He paused, head down, thinking.

"The obvious thing—you know. Hazzard's put me in charge. I shall have to send an undertaker in. I believe these fellows manage the whole business. Just a question of money."

She opened her lips and seemed soundless to echo that one word, "Money." Moorhouse passed her and paused.

"It seems that there is a little put away, but for the time being—if necessary—I'll wire my pater. We can manage."

She said, "I'm afraid—I can't help—with money."

His blue eyes gave her an upward stare.

"Oh, you! Of course not. That's on my shoulders for the moment."

So these two young things took charge, and people and circumstances were kind to them. Moorhouse, catching a midday train for Melfont after a wire to old Croft of Croft & Bromhead, found old Croft quite unexcited and practical. People died, and had to be buried, and estates wound up, and Mary Hazzard had left a cottage and a hundred or two pounds behind her. Mr. Croft sent Moorhouse on to find the Melfont doctor, who reduced another mountain to the size of a molehill. "I've attended her for years. Saw her a day or two before she went up to London. Heart—you know. It just stopped beating, died in her sleep—as you say. Oh, yes, I'll give a certificate." He asked after Christopher. "Fragile little chap. Glad he has pulled through. The mother was a rather remarkable woman, quite remarkable in her way." Apparently it was the easiest thing in the world to be buried provided the learned professions approved of the particular person's decease.

II

Ruth, a dark young creature, with the dignity of her shyness veiling her emotions, went softly into Hazzard's room and made up the fire. She knelt by the fender with her hair as black as the coal, and she remained there on her knees after the fire had been put in good heart. It was her room, though Hazzard occupied it, and somehow it seemed to have become more her room.

With drooped shoulders and pensive head she watched the little flames climb up, while Hazzard lay and looked straight up at the ceiling. His breathing had become tranquil; he made no movements; he lay there with his head sunk deep in the pillow. Almost it seemed to Ruth that he lay as still as his mother did in the room across the landing, as though something had died in him, and in her way she understood. Her compassion, tinged with her other tenderness, knelt by the fire and waited. He was so helpless, so very helpless, and there was no one to answer that most human of cries:

"Mother."

She was conscious of little inward tremblings. She folded her hands over the secret, new self in her, that little core of poignant redness, instinct burning and transfigured. She was—just woman. She asked for nothing else, knew nothing else, the expression of her sex. She had qualms, intuitions, impulses. She was a heart, and a womb, and a head.

But this silence of his? She understood it and waited upon it, while knowing that it would have to be broken. Necessity had climbed the stairs, necessity in the shape of a stout, bustling man with a red and raddled face and a blackness of chin and of coat. And where was the corpse? A young gent had called to arrange the funeral, and he of the decorous frayed blackness understood that the corpse would have to make a last journey into Wiltshire, and he wanted measurements for the coffin, and details. He had produced a note-book and a stumpy pencil.

Ruth had said, "Oh, Mr. Moorhouse has gone down to make arrangements. He will be back this evening. You see, Mr. Hazzard, the son, has been dangerously ill."

Necessity had waited with poised pencil.

"Quite so, Miss, but there's the brass plate, and the name and the age."

"I'll get them from Mr. Hazzard, and let you have them this afternoon. What address?"

He had given her his card, and then had asked if he might view the corpse, and she had shown him into that still, austere little room, and had fled away down the stairs to the other women and voices and the smell of cooking and the glow of a fire. She had felt chilled.

But now! She raised her head and glanced over her shoulder at the man in bed. She would have to ask him the questions. She shrank from it not a little, because the asking of questions would make her feel like putting her fingers into a wound. She picked up the poker and stirred gently at the fire.

She said, "The man has been, the man Mr. Moorhouse sent for. He wants to know things. I said I'd——"

She broke off and glanced at him shrinkingly. He did not move. When his voice came, the words made her think of bubbles floating up to the ceiling.

"What things?"

"Your mother's name and age."

"Mary. I don't know her age."

"Does it matter?"

His strange stillness, the deadness of his voice and face suggested that nothing mattered.

"I'll let him know."

And then she stirred restlessly on her knees, and putting a hand to her head, kept smoothing back her hair.

"There are all your mother's things. Shall I——"

He was slow in replying.

"Pack them up?"

"Yes."

"I suppose—it has got to be. Yes, please. When will Moorhouse be back?"

"This evening."

The silence redescended. It was like a weight. And when she rose from her knees it was with a sense of struggling against something that weighed her down.

III

But Ruth was not afraid of the calm, still figure lying in the other room, for she had been ready to love Mary Hazzard when alive, and she was not afraid of her now that she was dead. On going in she found that the man of the red and raddled presence had turned up the sheet and covered the dead face, and it seemed wrong to Ruth that such a face should be hidden because it was beautiful and without shame. So, she went softly to the bed, and turned back the sheet, and stood looking at Christopher's mother, nor was there any doubt in Ruth's mind but that Mary Hazzard had died for her son. It was as though she had passed through a second travail and a second birth, and now lay tranquil and at rest, knowing that her son lived.

Ruth, moved by her own thoughts and emotions, knelt down for a moment beside the bed. It may be that she felt herself to be the inheritor of Mary Hazzard's fortune. She had taken the mother's place. For it was part of her instinctive belief that man could not live without woman, and now that this void had opened in Hazzard's life he would need someone—perhaps her. It seemed so simple and so obvious.

Rising from her knees she set about her task. There were the dead woman's clothes and her toilet things. The black bag that Mary Hazzard had brought with her lay in a corner beside the hanging wardrobe. Ruth carried it to the table, and on opening it she found a little tin box lying at the bottom of the bag. She supposed that it was her duty to look into the tin box, and she did so, and in it she found a square leather case, two sovereigns, some silver, and half a dozen penny stamps. Ruth imagined that the leather case contained a watch, and she pressed the knob of the catch, and found herself looking at a gold medal lying on a crimson bed. It was the Angus Sandeman Medal.

Taking it out of the case and turning it over in her palm, she read the Latin inscription "*Victoria, et pro victoria—vita.*" She pon-

dered it. She had no Latin. And did Victoria refer to the late Queen, and what did "vita" mean? Victoria could be translated into victory, and Ruth was moved to glance at the figure on the bed. Yes, surely it should mean victory, victory, even in death. And how luminous and tranquil Mary Hazzard's face appeared.

But this medal was of gold; it was valuable, and she was moved to carry it and the money she had found into the other room. She showed the medal to Christopher.

"I have found this."

He put out a thin hand, and holding the medal like a small round mirror in his palm, stared at it.

"Where was it?"

"In a little tin box in her bag. I thought I ought to look at everything for you. And there was some money. Shall I put it in one of the drawers?"

"Please."

She did so, and turning found him still holding the medal and gazing at it, and his forehead expressed knotted effort. His lips moved. Soundlessly he uttered the words—"*Victoria, et pro victoria —vita.*" And she stood very still, as though feeling herself in the presence of a sacrament.

His hand sank to the bed and rested there. His eyes seemed to glaze over.

"I want you."

"Yes."

"I want this put in her coffin. You won't forget?"

Her eyes filled with sudden tears.

"Oh, no, I shall not forget."

IV

They buried Mary Hazzard in Melfont churchyard in a corner by the flint wall where the ground fell away steeply to the meadows and the river. Between a very old yew tree and the branches of a beech the top of Sisbury was visible, and on that winter day the hill appeared as part of the greyness of the sky.

Moorhouse went down to the funeral. A few villagers, and old Croft, and the doctor were the only people present, but a very stout woman holding a red-faced child by the hand, stodged round the grave after the service was over, and standing on the chalky edge, looked down at the coffin. Her face had some of the unctuousness of the chalk upon her boots. When the child, with a finger in one nostril, and its very blue eyes staring at the hole in the

ground, picked up a flint and threw it so that it fell and bounced on the coffin, Mrs. Prosser pretended to be shocked.

"How dare you do such a thing!"

She boxed the child's ears, and the brat screamed, and was lugged out of the churchyard by the arm. But Sarah Prosser sailed home to recount how Gladys had bounced a stone upon the coffin of the poor creature Mary Hazzard. A sort of final "That's that." And Sam Prosser had already been told to buy the Hazzard cottage. The eldest Prosser son was needing a cottage, and rather urgently so, because the girl he was to marry was six months gone with child.

Moorhouse travelled back through the dusk to London, and when the lamps were lit he climbed the stairs of No. 7. Ruth, back early from the City, slipped out of Hazzard's room as Moorhouse went in.

Moorhouse closed the door. He stood a moment by the bed, holding Hazzard's hand.

"It was done—quite beautifully."

"Did it rain?"

"No, just a quiet, grey day. How are things, old man?"

"My body's alive, Moorhouse; that's all."

Moorhouse went and sat by the fire, and Hazzard's eyes were on him, for Moorhouse was human and good to look at. The world was so very grey, and there was an emptiness.

Said Moorhouse presently, "I had a talk with that old lawyer fellow, Croft. He is settling everything. He wanted me to ask you. Can I ask you?"

"What?"

"About your mother's cottage. Do you want it sold? There are some people ready to buy. It seems rather beastly—but I promised——"

Hazzard's head raised itself from the pillow.

"Who? Did he say——?"

"People named Prosser, I think—farmers."

Hazzard's head seemed to hang there rigid and lean upon its tense stalk of a neck.

"The Prossers. No, my mother's cottage isn't for sale. I shall keep it—always."

V

"Bennet's" sent a trained nurse to No. 7 Roper's Row to take charge of Hazzard during his convalescence, a big, buxom, authoritative creature who made the flimsy stairs creak and roused

tremors of jealousy in Ruth Avery. The nurse, who slept at "Bennet's Hostel," arrived at eight in the morning, and left about ten o'clock at night, and Ruth, who was back again at Messrs. Fogson & George's, found the professional perpetually in charge. The nurse had her meals sent up by the Bunces. She was off duty for a couple of hours in the afternoon, and would go out and walk, but whenever Ruth dared to climb the stairs of No. 7, she found the big creature established like the proprietress of a show.

Ruth hated her, because she was so immovable, and so sure of her authority, and appeared to see no reason why life should be regarded as a sentimental affair. She wore a uniform, and Ruth had no uniform, and no excuses to offer. The nurse assumed that Ruth had come to inquire after Hazzard's progress, and stood in front of the closed door, and was officially bland and blind.

"He is doing very well, thank you."

Moorhouse, of course, was admitted with smiles, and Ruth, finding herself so properly excluded during the official day, slipped along to No. 7 after ten o'clock. She had to ring, for the door was locked, and Ophelia, her pale eyes full of sleep, opened the door to Ruth.

"Oh, it's you, Miss Avery."

"How is Mr. Hazzard?"

"He sat up a bit to-day."

But Ophelia was as impenetrable as the nurse; she closed the gap between the half-opened door and the wall of the passage with a body that was impatient for bed. She had every right to assume that another young woman would not suppose herself justified in going up to a gentleman's room after ten o'clock at night, and him an invalid and needing sleep. Ruth loitered and was repulsed.

"I'll come round to-morrow and inquire. Will you tell him I called?"

"Yes, I'll tell the nurse."

On the Saturday afternoon Ruth did carry the defences of No. 7, for the nurse was out walking and the street door was unlocked. She climbed the stairs and knocked at Hazzard's door.

"Who's that?"

His voice had recovered strength and resonance.

"It's Ruth."

"Oh, Miss Avery. I'm afraid I'm keeping you out of your room a long time."

Her smiling face winced.

"Oh, not at all. Are you seeing visitors?"

She heard a rustling sound and the creaking of a chair.

"Yes, please come in for a moment. I'm expecting Moorhouse."

She entered, but not as she had dreamed of returning to him, with a sense of unforgettable memories shared between them, and a soft meeting of eyes and hands. The relationship remained for her where she had left it, tearful, intimate and tender. She saw him sitting by the fire, wrapped up in a red "Bennet's" dressing-gown, and propped by pillows. His eyes looked very large and still in a face that was starkly pale.

She faltered.

"Oh, I'm so glad you are better."

He said, "Please sit down."

She sat down. She discovered the formality of the occasion, and in him a curious stiffness. He looked very dry and thin. He had a book on his knees, some text-book or other, and she felt hurt by that book.

He said, "I want to thank you for all your kindness. I hope to be out of your way in a week or so. They want me to go for a holiday."

Her wide eyes reproached life.

"Oh, I did nothing. And where are you going?"

"They think I am going to Bournemouth."

"And are you?"

"No. I'm going down to Melfont, my mother's cottage."

"By yourself? But won't you——"

"An old friend of my mother is going to look after me. I shall be quite fit in a week or two."

She waited. A part of her quivered with inward protests. Her dark and denied eyes asked, "And then?"

His fingers touched the book on his knees.

"Work. I shall come back and get to work. I suppose that's the one thing that keeps a man going."

And then Moorhouse's footsteps were heard on the stairs, and Ruth got up, and with a face that wavered between a smile and tears, met Moorhouse on the landing and went past him with eyes of dissembled shame.

Chapter Fourteen

I

HAZZARD was to travel down into Wiltshire on the Friday, and on the Saturday her room would be at Ruth's service after Mrs. Bunce had burned a sulphur candle in it, and Hazzard would be charged for the candle.

Moorhouse had taken him for drives in somebody's carriage borrowed for an hour, and he had walked on his own feet as far as Regent's Park. Mrs. Bunce might protest and attempt motherly interference, but Hazzard appeared obstinate, simply because he did not care.

Ruth came to No. 7 on the evening of the Thursday. Mrs. Bunce's spectacles were agitated. She had had a trying day, and was seeking some person upon whom she could pin a collection of worries, and Hazzard became that person. She was out of patience with Hazzard.

"Now, I ask you, is it sense for a man who's bin at death's door to go rummagin' about, and kickin' up the dust? Puttin' a few things in a bag is allowable, but what must 'e do but turn out all 'is drawers. 'Mr. 'Azzard,' I says to 'im, 'now why don't you leave all that to me and Phelia?' but 'e just goes on without takin' any notice. That's what's queer, 'e just doesn't take any notice."

Ruth seized her opportunity when Mrs. Bunce was recovering her breath.

"What is he doing,—packing?"

"Yes, packing, and clearing up both rooms—as though no one else was fit to touch anythink."

"But he's not fit."

"That's what I say, Miss."

"I'll go up. Perhaps he'll let me do it for him."

"Well, you can try. There's no 'arm in tryin'. As I said to that Mr. Moor'ouse this mornin'——"

But Ruth did not want to hear what Mrs. Bunce had had to say to Julian Moorhouse. Her hand slid along the familiar rail of the staircase; she went up and up, past the door of the irritable Mr. Crapp to whom the whole Hazzard tragedy had been a most infernal nuisance, past the hole in the stair carpet that was always being darned and refusing to stay darned.

The little twinkling gas-jet on the upper landing splintered its feeble light on the faded yellow wall-paper. The scent of cooked cabbage ascended with her, a green smell.

As she mounted the last steps she saw Hazzard coming out of his room with a pile of books that reached from his hands to his chin. He appeared quite unaware of her presence. He had a tin trunk open under the gas-jet on the landing, and the books were intended for the trunk, but as he bent to deposit them on a chair the whole pile sagged forward and slid pell-mell to the floor.

Her interference was all impulse.

"Oh, you shouldn't."

She was down on her knees among the spilt books. Some of them had fallen open, and had their leaves crumpled, and she straightened them out, and he stood there and watched her, with his arms hanging limply. A fit of coughing took him, and some other spasm followed it, and outbursts of long suppressed emotion. He sat down on the chair upon which he had meant to place the books. His head sagged; she looked up to see his face wincing towards tears.

She had a book in her hand. Her face, catching the pale light, expressed a sudden passion of tenderness. She was all eyes and poignant mouth. She put the book down on the floor, and moving towards him on her knees, touched him with both her hands.

"You shouldn't. You're not strong yet.—I'll pack for you."

His head sank lower. It was very near to her shoulder, and she put up her hands and drew it gently to rest.

"What a damned fool I am."

"There, there."

Her eyes yearned. She caressed him. Her dear sense of possession trembled towards an imagined completeness.

"I'll pack for you. You—you must take more care of yourself. You're not strong yet."

"I've done a bit too much, that's all."

"But that's too much. Do you want to take all these books? Must you take all of them?"

He made a movement of the head.

"Mustn't waste a whole fortnight."

"But you have never wasted a day. You work so hard."

His head came up, its face haggard but wilful.

"I've got to work a damned sight harder."

Her wide, wet eyes protested.

"Oh, no, do take care. Shall I put all these books in the bottom of the trunk?"

"If you will. It's very good of you. I shan't be such a fool again."

She looked at him and then slithered on her knees towards the books and the tin trunk. Why should he assume it to be folly? Wasn't such folly the only wisdom that was human and worth while?

II

Sisbury Hill was so sexless. True, the solitary stone upon it stood like a phallic emblem, and there was an old superstition in the village that the girl who kissed that stone at midnight on the twentieth of June would fall to the man she fancied. Looking from his mother's window half an hour after his arrival Christopher saw Sisbury with the red circle of the winter sun behind it. He had seen Sisbury as a brow, and never as a bosom. Its rotundity was that of a skull; it knew no loins or thighs; it brooded; the very clouds were its thoughts. If a river, a hill, or a valley can be said to have personality, then Sisbury had it, and was the hill of the Hazzards, a curve in contrast to a line, and its curves were cerebral. Others might have likened it to a sponge full of purple wine, a breast, a sprawling place for hot and tumbling youth. Both to Christopher and his mother Sisbury had always been a brow, and sometimes a face—mysterious and prophetic.

One, Mrs. Tribute, a round body with black pebbles for eyes, had come from a neighbouring cottage to light fires and air sheets and blankets, and to deposit in the larder bread, butter, bacon, a jug of milk. She, having inherited Mary Hazzard's hens, brought six of the same brown eggs. The poor lad needed feeding up. He looked like a skeleton, all eyes, and with poor Mary lying in the chalk over yonder, dead before her life's desire had set its seed. Mrs. Tribute had bustled. She was like a round black kettle comfortably on the boil, but Christopher had stood at the window watching the sun sink behind Sisbury.

"There, my dear, I'll just drop round again presently."

Mrs. Tribute "my deared" everybody, even things inanimate such as the pump in the dairy. Christopher was to eat a hot dish of bacon and eggs, and to feel better for it, with Mrs. Tribute's black-eyed smile to serve as a stomachic, but he stood moping at the window, and paying no attention to savoury odours.

"That's all right, Mrs. Tribute. You need not bother to come over again."

"It's no bother, my dear. There'll be the things to wash up. Your bed's made, and there's a hundredweight of coal in the cupboard."

"You've been very good. Please don't bother to-night. I shall go to bed very early."

He spoke as though throwing the words through the casement panes, and without looking at Mrs. Tribute, but as she backed towards the door, observing him with sympathetic solicitude, he seemed to remember that she would have other uses.

"Oh, Mrs. Tribute."

"Yes, my dear."

"Perhaps you have heard that I am keeping on the cottage. I wonder if you would be able to come in once a week and light fires and dust?"

"Of course I could, my dear."

"That's good. I want to keep the cottage just as it was, nothing altered."

Mrs. Tribute's globular figure disappeared through the gate into the lane, and Hazzard, leaving the chintz curtains undrawn so that he could see Sisbury growing very black against a suffused sky, sat down to his tea. He was alone and yet not alone. Everything in the familiar room had a voice and the consciousness of association, and directly he had entered the cottage he had felt the presence of his mother. Always she had used a Windsor chair with arms, and a red cushion covering the seat, and he had placed her chair at the table. It seemed to him that she was seated opposite him, watching him at his meal and willing him to eat well, and answering all his thoughts. If Sisbury survived, so did she, and his thinking took the form of uttered words addressed to that presence. He had emerged from a black anguish to the conviction that his mother lived, that the annihilation of Mary and mother was unthinkable, and that the understanding between them survived. That was why he had gone to the grave in Melfont churchyard and had looked at it for a moment, and then had come away with a kind of dry-eyed calmness. His mother was not there. She was here, by the fire, under the shadow of Sisbury, and not glued up in a mass of oozy chalk. He could not say how or why he was so sure. It was as though some primordial super-sense—a heritage from the old hill folk—enabled him to divine immortality. He allowed the truth its strangeness, that he, a little, scientific fellow with the eye of realism seeking facts, a microscope man, should in this great matter retain the eyes of a child.

He could say, "I'm much better, Mother. You can see for yourself. After a week here with you I shall go back to work. And such work."

He felt that he could say all the intimate things, speak to the

spirit mother even more openly than he had spoken to Mary Hazzard in the flesh.

"Don't worry. They shall not make you look a fool."

It grew dark, and he lit his mother's lamp, a lamp that hung by chains from the central beam, but he left the curtains undrawn. He had the tray in his hands and was about to carry it into the scullery when he heard the thud of the garden gate. Footsteps came down the path, heavy and sluggish like the tramp of some heavy animal.

Hazzard replaced the tray on the table. The expected knock sounded on the door, and he went to open it, and found Prosser there. The man's pale blue eyes seemed to look at him through a mass of sheepish hair. He fidgeted with his big feet.

"Evening to you, Christopher."

He was for edging in, and Hazzard let him in.

"These there things will happen, my lad. As I said to my missus —it gives you to think.—And how are you keeping—yourself?"

"I am very well, Mr. Prosser, thank you."

"Well,—that's good, that's good. And considering——"

He made as though to sit down in Mary Hazzard's chair, and Kit, with a startled look, stopped him.

"Not there.—That's my mother's chair."

The farmer's sheep's eyes widened. He made a clumsy movement towards the fire, felt in his pockets, and stood staring.

"Well, I thought as I might do 'ee a good turn, my lad. I've heard as you want the cottage taken off your hands."

He was a clumsy brute, pushed on by his wife, and Hazzard's face seemed to sharpen to a cutting edge.

"Who told you that?"

"Oh, I heard it in Melfont."

"Melfont can mind its own business. My mother's cottage is not for sale."

Sam Prosser seemed to peer through his hair.

"For lettin' it, are ye?"

"No."

"Not for livin' here yourself, surely?"

"No. Only now and again. I'm keeping the cottage and the furniture. That's all, Mr. Prosser. And perhaps that's all you want."

Prosser had begun to fill a pipe. His mouth seemed full of moisture. He swallowed. He peered again at Hazzard, and saw Hazzard's eyes fixed on his mother's chair. And there was something in the younger man's eyes.

Prosser lit his pipe rather hurriedly, making a sucking noise, and gathered his hat, and made for the door with one of those peering, uneasy glances over his shoulder.

"Well, I did think as I might do 'ee a good turn, seeing that your mother is dead."

Hazzard's face was like the lamp, only whiter and more potent.

"She's not dead."

The farmer shambled out with another backward glance. These Hazzards had always been unaccountable, queer people, most uncomfortable people.

III

Ruth had some right to assume that when a man has allowed himself to fall into a certain attitude such a posture may be considered to have some elements of permanency. The attitude had had significance as it concerned herself. She did not regard it as incidental, but she did accept it as an incident of supreme significance. A man's head on your shoulder was a man's head on your shoulder. Such a happening conferred upon you a charter giving you the right to dream of yourself as the chatelaine of the particular man's emotions.

Ruth dreamed. She returned to No. 7, to a room that had been fumigated and scrubbed; she sat herself down on the hearth-rug, like a large-eyed Persian cat. She had the air of possessing a secret, and she carried it to and fro with a sense of innocent self-importance, just as a woman carries a child about in her, and is made aware of a mysterious self-significance. The other girls at Fogson & George's observed her "mooniness," the polish of her little, sweet, pale sufficiency. Mr. George, the eternal ogler, found his casts lost in deep waters. Ruth day-dreamed, and her typewriter perpetrated gross errors. She got her dates wrong, and muddled up addresses, and managed to send off letters in the wrong envelopes. Old Fogson, having had one such letter returned to him with a note of sarcasm, asked the head clerk for explanations. They were forthcoming.

"Oh, that's it."

He had a crusty philosophy. He held that a man was a more reliable machine than a woman, and a married man more so than a bachelor. A woman's head was lost directly the sex in her became active. The results were exasperating yet inevitable.

He said, "You had better tell Miss Avery to hang up her private emotions with her mackintosh."

But men are weak creatures, and Ruth was told no such thing.

The winter was slipping by, and the days were lengthening, and February brought sunlight, frosty mornings, and skies as clear as London skies could be. At the window across the way hyacinths were spearing up in green and blue glasses. Even the smoke pluming the many chimneys trailed wavering pennons of promise. Ruth had a tame cock-sparrow that came to pick up crumbs on her window-sill, and the little impudent black eyes seemed to rally her. "Oh, yes, I know all about these affairs. A fellow has to have somebody to help make the nest, and lay the eggs."

During those fourteen days Ruth watched the lily of her dreams grow, and watered it with her expectations. She wrote one letter to Hazzard, a spontaneous effort that presumed itself to be prompted by friendliness; she asked demurely after his health, and warned him to be careful. She thought of him now as a motherless child, alone in a cottage that must be so full of poignant memories, and softly she prepared to slip her little feet into the other woman's shoes. Her love had that sacred and simple compassion that alone makes love worth while.

IV

On the day of Christopher's return to No. 7 Roper's Row Ruth was kept late at the office. She caught a 'bus at the Bank, but it was twenty to eight before she reached No. 7, and mounting the stairs, saw a streak of light under Hazzard's door. Her ascent was studied. She expected him to hear her quick and vibrant footsteps, and to open his door and to come out to her. He should wear the look of a lover.

Her expectancy fluttered on the last step. She loitered, waiting for the sound of movement, and a significant darkening of that strip of light. Her eyes watched the brass handle. But the silence remained as unbroken as the bar of light, and with a sudden sense of frustration she moved across to her own room.

Her disappointment searched for explanations. He had not returned yet, or if he had returned he had gone out and forgotten to turn down the gas, or he was tired and had gone to bed. Or perhaps he had assumed her footsteps to be those of Ophelia?

She closed her door rather sharply. It was meant as a signal, a challenge, and she stood listening, holding the handle, expecting some response. The silence continued, and being oppressed by it, she opened her door again, and walked as far as the head of the stairs. She called down the stairs.

"Phelia, Phelia, Miss Bunce."

A voice answered from the depths.

"Yes, Miss."

"Did you take any milk for me?"

"Yes, Miss. I'll be up with the tray in a jiffy."

Ruth, with her eyes on Hazzard's door, backed softly towards her room. Was he in there? Surely, if he was in his room he would come out and speak to her? He couldn't be in there, and she went in and closed her door, and took off her hat and felt dispirited and peeved. She had had a long day, and Mr. George had been funny and irritable. Yes, she was tired. She sat down on the bed.

Ophelia arrived half a minute later with the tray. She had her hair very much in curl.

"You—are—late, Miss."

"Yes, a rush of work."

She tried to make her voice sound casual.

"Mr. Hazzard back yet?"

"Yes. He came back in the middle of the afternoon. He's a queer gen'leman."

Ruth bent down to unbutton her shoes.

"How——?"

"Started unpacking his books—at once. Mother sent me up with a cup o' tea, and what do you think 'e was doin'?"

Ruth's silence was a listening ear.

"Sittin' at 'is table with books and papers, just as though nothink 'ad 'appened. 'E hardly looked round at me. 'E just said, 'Oh, put it down there, Ophelia, please, and thank your mother.' An' all the while 'e was scribblin'."

One of Ruth's shoes came off with a protesting clatter.

"Is he working—now?"

"I suppose so, Miss. I saw a light under 'is door."

V

Such was the effect of his mother's death upon Christopher Hazzard. His body behaved like a little obedient machine, carrying his big head and its purpose to and fro between the hospital and Roper's Row. He had to wash and dress his body, feed it, and allow it to lie abed for some six hours, but that was all that he did allow it. The figure that was Hazzard emerged from its room at a quarter to nine each morning, and went limping swiftly down the stairs, and through the streets, to return about seven in the evening, when it would be allowed to eat and to smoke a pipe. But

for the rest of the evening it would sit supporting that tyrant of a head that seemed to cast a round and swollen shadow on the wall.

Mrs. Bunce had opinions. "Well, all I can say is—it ain't 'uman." And it wasn't. Superhuman it might be, a kind of cold fury, a frenzy both to accomplish and to escape, but, like the majority of exceptional human happenings, its inwardness was invisible. For Hazzard went about with a bleak, preoccupied face, lips compressed, forehead concentrated. He did not look at people. He talked to no one, except to Moorhouse, and Moorhouse was the one man who had glimpses of the structure that this little lame man was building. And even Moorhouse had no more than glimpses, for that is all that consciousness allows us, an occasional glimmer of the essential, inward "I" in friend, and wife, and lover.

Nor was Hazzard himself conscious of waving a flag, or of spouting his own particular rendering of "Excelsior." He was alone in the world, and yet not alone. His mother's death and the manner of it had stricken so deep and left so poignant a rawness, and his fury to accomplish was a natural response. He knew that she had sacrificed herself during that one devoted week, and that she had died before she had seen all that she had wished to see. But she should see it. His almost fanatical and secret grieving was so human and yet so concealed, that when it was transmuted into work it appeared a mere cold, egotistical frenzy.

Yet the child in him cried out, "Mother, Mother," while the man in him bent to build a monument that should be his and hers. No stone was needed in Melfont churchyard. He would show Melfont other stones. He would light a beacon on Sisbury. He would keep that cottage of hers unchanged and inviolate, proof against all Prosserdom.

Egotism it might be, a passion to express a very deep emotion, but other eyes saw it in other ways, or saw it not at all. At "Bennet's" he was more and more the phenomenon, a sort of little professor among the young, with his supremacy unquestioned, not a mere bookish person, a futile gold medallist, but a man who had hands and the courage to use them. Most young men shirk responsibility, the acid test of individual achievement, but Hazzard went in search of it. He was not afraid of failing, of the crowd's smirks, of appearing a fool. Meanwhile he had his half-dozen blunderheads to coach, Bullard among them, and perhaps no one was more surprised than Bullard when he discovered that the little man could coerce and persuade.

He was on the way to being called "A hard little devil." He had

a bleak, impartial, urgent face. He had no words to waste. He was understudying Badger the bacteriologist, and for some three hours a day he was messing about with cultures and staining reagents, or had his eye glued to a microscope, and Badger was finding him abominably reliable.

If there was a tubercle bacillus to be found it was found, a little coloured red in a round circle of light. In the out-patient departments junior physicians turned him over awkward cases, partly out of curiosity. "See what you make of that, Hazzard."

But other eyes saw him differently, the eyes of the girl in the room across the landing. She waited and she waited. They met at times on the stairs as of old, and his face had that distant, bright, yet almost unfriendly look. He spoke to her as he might have spoken to a man who had done him a kindness and was quite likeable as a neighbour.

There was a voice in Ruth that cried protestingly, "He's not a man, but a machine."

And, like a child, she felt passionately moved to break the machine in him, to stop those busy, whirring wheels. Or perhaps she had glimpses of his inspiration, and was jealous of it.

She wanted to say, "You're blind. You don't see. Life is nothing but work, work. Stop and think—and feel."

And the occasion came when she did dare to say something of the kind to him, and found herself like a bird that has flown at a closed window. She was dashed against glass.

He did not seem to understand. He gave her a queer little smile.

"Oh, no, I'm afraid I haven't time. Good of you to suggest it. But—I'm sorry."

The two doors closed; he went to his books, and she to her bed.

VI

But at Chelsea Sally Sherman received the outpourings that had been suppressed.

"Oh, my dear, I'm so unhappy."

There were tears, while the two sat side by side on Sally's bed, and the storm cried itself out. There were no explanations. Ruth offered none, and Sally did not ask for them, nor were they needed. When such a storm occurred, you could be pretty sure of the source of the electrical discharge.

"I'm so lonely—there. I'm fed up with it. I—I wish I could come here."

Sally, being a practical young woman with no little affection for this dark-eyed thing, saw no reason why Ruth should not come to Chelsea.

"I'll get a room, and you can meal with us. I'd love it."

Ruth clung to her.

"Oh, you are a dear."

Chapter Fifteen

I

MR. ROBERT CRAPP, returning from one of his Saturday afternoon rambles in and around Regent's Park, discovered a little crowd of children bunched outside what had been the shop front of No. 7 Roper's Row. They were listening to sounds of music produced by a gramophone hired for the occasion, and to the voices of other children, and Mr. Robert Crapp knew that Dr. Christopher Hazzard was giving one of his parties. Mrs. Bunce had died two years ago; Ophelia had married a grocer's assistant, and Hazzard had taken over the lease of No. 7. He sublet the first floor to Robert Crapp.

Mr. Crapp let himself in with his latch-key and paused in the passage to look through the glazed door at Hazzard, who was winding the handle of a gramophone while a dozen small children gathered round him. Tables and chairs had been pushed back against the walls, and a space left for the children to dance.

Robert Crapp did not like children. He differed from Hazzard in liking them not at all, while Hazzard liked them only when they were sick. His interest began to wane when a child ceased to be ill. These little parties of his, given about once a month, were attended only by little cripples, and small creatures with various affections that did not keep them abed. Mothers or sisters brought them from any semi-slum within five miles of Oxford Circus, and shared the buns and the tea and the music.

Mr. Crapp's face seen through a dim pane of glass was even more pallid and chilling than when looked at in the open street. He was very tall and straight; he had a high forehead, grey moustachios that waved, very cold and pale blue eyes of the variety known as "piercing." Imagine an ancient Gaul frozen stiff, pale as cut ice, and dressed up in a meagre frock-coat and top hat. There was no flexion about the fellow. His voice was dry and abrupt, his conversation ejaculatory. He had a liking for sarcasm.

One small girl, her neck swathed in bandages, catching sight of that face close to the glass panel, pointed a denouncing finger.

"Oh, look at the horrid man!"

Everybody looked, and Hazzard with them.

"It's only Mr. Crapp."

Somerset House might have queried the "only," and proceeding to put forth memoranda, inveigled Hazzard into an official correspondence of infinite length and futility. Someone, in a moment of heat, had called Bob Crapp a jackal, and he had objected and objected with venom. He would have permitted himself to be called a grey wolf, because there were moments when he felt himself licking shrewd, grey, hungry jaws. But his face disappeared from the glazed door. He went up the stairs, carrying his top hat shoulder high. He looked at the face of the grandfather clock on the landing. He disliked the clock; it was eccentric and inexact; it struck thirteen instead of six, and twenty-three instead of twelve. Such a clock would have attempted to deceive the Inland Revenue. Mr. Crapp disliked it as he disliked Hazzard, but while disliking a man you may find in him a curious streak of cold conviviality. Besides, living at No. 7 was cheap, and Crapp and Hazzard shared the services of Mrs. Duggan.

Somerset House rang its bell. Mrs. Duggan was deaf, just sufficiently deaf to suit two men who never looked at a petticoat, and did not encourage conversation. Mrs. Duggan appeared, a woman with dead eyes and a lipless mouth, whose hair had once been yellow. She had the air of a corpse that had got up and walked in its shroud.

"Tea," said Somerset House.

Mrs. Duggan had a way of repeating the last three words of the other person's remark. It showed that she had heard the words, and it saved tissue, and Mrs. Duggan was a very tired woman.

"Tea."

She could never be persuaded to call Mr. Crapp "sir," whereas she would "sir" Hazzard. Possibly she did apprehend the fact that the one was a jackal and the other a lion.

"Don't forget the tomatoes with my chop."

"Tomatoes with your chop."

Somerset House was tiresome. It had tomatoes with its chop five days out of seven, but must needs show its authority and advertise a meticulous preciseness by issuing quite unnecessary instructions. Moreover, Mrs. Duggan had arrived at that period of her life when some women have strange qualms. She was sorry for the red tomatoes. She had seen Somerset House at its food, its long jaw with the sharp and bumpy chin going up and down, and so obviously hinged and full of false teeth. It gave Mrs. Duggan qualms to see Mr. Crapp's false teeth grinning at her from a tooth-glass on the mantelpiece, for he had a habit of taking them out to ease his gums.

"Don't make the tea too strong."

"Not too strong."

Going downstairs and passing the end of the passage she heard swirls of childish laughter, and her dead face became suddenly alive and soft and mysterious. She heard a small voice shouting, "Make me a piggy back, too, Dr. Christopher." Yes, men were odd creatures, but some of them were lovable just for the sake of their oddities.

To Mrs. Duggan Dr. Christopher Hazzard was an odd creature, a very learned and mysterious person who kept a room at the top of the house securely locked, a kind of Bluebeard's chamber. It was the old original room with the big window looking out upon the cliffs of brickwork and the great poplar tree, the room in which Hazzard had begun his struggle and in which his mother had died. It was now his laboratory, with water and gas laid on. At the beginning of her ministrations Hazzard had taken Mrs. Duggan up to that room, and had permitted her to see a white sink, and a funny-looking black thing like an oven, and rows of bottles and test-tubes stuffed with cotton-wool, and glass dishes. Hazzard had taken one of the test-tubes from a stand, and holding it up to the light, allowed Mrs. Duggan to look at a cloudy, opalescent fluid.

"You see that? Enough germs in it to poison the whole of Bloomsbury."

He had given Mrs. Duggan to understand that the room was both dangerous and sacred. No dustings, no invasions. And afterwards she had never entered the room. She had enough to do without adding pryings to her activities. There was the lecture room—the converted shop—to be dusted and swept, for Dr. Hazzard had the reputation of being the most successful shepherd of idlers and dullards, and nearly every evening he coached a class of students. Then, there were the cages of guinea-pigs in the backyard, and the little garden on a flat piece of leaded roof reached by a ladder, though Dr. Hazzard fed the guinea-pigs and watered the flower-pots. He grew roses in the pots, cuttings from Mary Hazzard's garden at Melfont. He was the busiest male thing Mrs. Duggan had ever met. And he had exactly three shirts in his wardrobe, and the bottoms of his trousers were always on the edge of fraying, and he took a cold bath each morning. He was a very eccentric gentleman, abrupt yet courteous, not kind, but aloofly just and considerate. You knew to the eighth of an inch where you were with him. He was not like Somerset House, fussy and sarcastic and exacting.

II

When the children had gone, Hazzard walked through the house into the back-yard where half a dozen hutches with wire runs stood against the wall upon which most of the day's sunlight fell. A bowl full of cabbage and lettuce leaves had been placed ready on one of the hutches, and Hazzard stood and fed the creatures, tearing the green leaves into strips and pushing them through the meshes of the wire.

He was thirty-three years old and he looked forty. His face had a quiet austerity. There were moments in his life when it betrayed a kind of silent fierceness. Also, it was the face of a man, who sitting tensely and for hours at a table, observed and observed again, and with a fanatical patience and thoroughness, the realities of the infinitely little. He had the mouth and the forehead and the eyes of one who had set himself to do difficult things.

The little funny creatures nibbling at the green leaves brought a smile to his face. He had an affection for the little pigs, though he had to use them, and perhaps because of it. He used himself. He and they were part of the significance of life.

Somerset House, leaning out of its bedroom window, dropped an ejaculatory remark.

"Ha, guinea-pig tea. Ignorance is bliss."

Hazzard was completely indifferent to Mr. Robert Crapp. The fellow had taken the first floor off his hands, and he paid his rent regularly, and perpetrated no noises. Probably Christopher despised Somerset House, as the positive man despises the negative one. Hazzard searched creation; Crapp helped to search pockets. Somerset House was always wondering why Hazzard paid so little income tax. It had looked up the figures. These doctor chaps could take fees and keep no records.

Hazzard, without raising his eyes, replied to Mr. Crapp.

"To be dainty is to be wise. Any liking for green food, Crapp?"

"I prefer a cooked tomato. Nothing in the rumour—I suppose—that tomatoes cause cancer?"

A puckish gleam came into Hazzard's eyes.

"I'm not so sure. It's quite possible. I think I should remove all the seeds, and add a pinch of bicarbonate of soda."

"Ha, indeed!"

The bloodless, very blue-eyed face disappeared, and Hazzard wondered whether Somerset House would seriously set itself to extract the seeds from the red pulp. And might he not have

hinted that the skins were very indigestible? Meanwhile his guinea-pigs ate crisply and without gastric worry.

Afterwards, Hazzard mounted to his garden on the roof. It was reached by way of a ladder and a trap-door from the upper landing, a flat, leaded space between two slopes of slates. The brickwork of the cornice shut it off on the side of Roper's Row. Here, Hazzard had pots of musk and roses and a plant of sweetbriar, and an old deck-chair and a box to serve as a table. He could look into the flickering top of the big poplar tree. He could be alone here, in London, yet not of it; above London in a world of mysticism and of chimney-pots. No one overlooked him, while he had a feeling that he was the lord of far horizons, and that he could see Sisbury floating like a grey-green bubble in the west.

Sometimes he would climb up here at night, and see mysterious lighted windows, and still more mysterious stars. He did much of his thinking in this crow's nest.

Those golden guineas studding the sky! They were as distant as the earthly guineas, for though Hazzard had been a qualified medical practitioner for seven years he had not earned a single creditable fee. He had held every house appointment at "Bennet's," and had received nothing but his keep. Now, he was Medical Registrar, a respectable and responsible figure, and receiving in hard cash—just nothing. He had been elected to the staff of the Marylebone Hospital for Sick Children, and the work there was honorary and unpaid. He lived on his coaching of dull and lazy pups, but as a mere physician he was not paid a penny.

He would often wonder if the world knew. It was as though the searcher was made to wander and starve in a desert. You set out to search for healing herbs—not for yourself but for humanity, and the world left you to feed upon stones. You might discover some priceless and healing balm, and you would be held in less honour than a wench kicking her legs upon the stage. It wasn't that you set out in search of the guineas or the glory. You might be ready to embrace poverty and to live like an early Franciscan, but for the sake of the grace and the grandeur of your human pilgrimage you did ask to be fed and given shelter at night.

And yet every imaginable hindrance seemed to be placed in the path of the searcher. He was treated as a hack and a drudge; he was exposed to hostility and prejudice, for it may be that so devoted a creature offends against the sensual man's flesh cult. Hazzard had no illusions. He knew that his fervour and his patience made older and more cynical men look at him askance. He could

be regarded as a crank and a fanatic, a kind of little, shabby, sexless Christ carrying a home-made cross.

He had had ten brilliant years, and in the world's money-market he was not worth the wage of a warehouseman. He did not belong to the money-market, but he asked to be allowed to live in order that he might work. Observe, analyse, experiment. He was the born searcher, the experimentalist; his urge was to discover, not to follow the conventional footsteps of other men. He knew that many a searcher had been driven away by poverty to be lost in some humdrum suburban or provincial practice. He too might have been starved and shredded into surrender, but for the devoted passion that was in him and his success in feeding pups.

Yes, the fellows with money could afford to wait. The moneyless genius might be ground to powder by his very poverty. Or he might marry a wife who had money, and probably she would have social ambitions, and one form of slavery would be replaced by another. But money had its curse. Poverty may play like the north wind, eliminating the soft fleshed, and blowing a fierce endurance into the bones of your belief. Hazzard endured, and he was happy in enduring. He felt no bitterness. His mother had never been bitter. He thought much and often of his mother.

III

At "Bennet's" Hazzard appeared to the students of the day as a little, dark, aloof man in a black coat and grey trousers, seen here, there and everywhere with a big black ledger under his arm. He functioned as a sort of recorder, a shadowy person who never appeared to speak. He aroused in some of the members of the staff a mistrust and a vague fear. They were polite to him. He deputized for some of them in the out-patient departments, and when it was known that Hazzard was taking out-patients, students gathered, if they were keen. For then the shadow man that was Christopher Hazzard became vital and assailing. He could teach. He had a curious, original, magnetic way with him. To see him disentangle a complex case and explain it was like watching some exquisite piece of artistry. He was an artist.

And yet, somehow, it was known that Hazzard was not popular with some of the senior members of the staff. He was an oddity. He had a puckish and almost sardonic humour. He could be devastatingly silent.

Even lads would say, "He's a brilliant little beggar, but he'll never get on the staff."

Someone might reply, "Rot,—of course he will."

Others would retort, "They mean to keep him off. Who? Oh, old Fanny and the Tom Tit. He's not *persona grata*. Isn't it obvious? He's too damned clever, and he hasn't a cent. Besides, look at his clothes."

Youth has a flair for these things. The wise and worldly old men can play Peter at the Golden Gate.

As for the nursing staff, those young women so serious and demure when under the eyes of the Matron or the Sisters, but ready to give life a gaillard beckoning glance when the way was clear to them, Hazzard was flat fish. He was supposed to be a misogynist, a misanthropic devil. They discussed him as they discussed all members of the staff, and had nicknames for them. They could get together with giggles and whisperings and make enormous fun of any man who was not so supremely a he man that his function in life was not obvious and as sexually convincing. Their name for Hazzard was Dr. Pip. Absurd gossip floated around him. It was said that he lived on dry toast and green apples, and that he wore the same shirt for a month. To these young women he was not exciting.

Moorhouse, coming up from Winchester, where he had purchased a share in the leading practice, saw certain aspects of his friend's career, and was touched and scandalized. Moorhouse was Winchester but without a cathedral city's obliqueness. He had a thousand a year, a pretty wife, a little daughter, and an old red Georgian house. He hunted once a week in the season, or went out with the New Forest Otter Hounds. He would spend an occasional hour on Hazzard's roof-garden, and having one or two friends on the staff at "Bennet's" he was shown this little world of pride and prejudice.

He had his information from one—John McDonald—a junior surgeon, a laconic, open-eyed, big-hearted person who liked Hazzard and understood him. And to Moorhouse he confessed that Christopher was exploring a blind alley.

"He's too new, Moorhouse."

Moorhouse supposed that the hoary persons resented newness.

"Not altogether that," said the Scotchman. "Youth presses at the gate. And there are people who plan to keep the gate closed."

"Selfish old devils."

"Wise old devils. Besides, not all of them. We have one or two big men. But there is such a thing as being found out, being caught with all your old rusty, obsolete underclothing on."

"Out of date?"

"Exactly. Hazzard's new. He's rather merciless. All fanatics are, and he's a bit of a fanatic. I suppose these old stag royals scent him as the young buck. He appears to them a prying, offensive, horribly efficient little man. They'd like to bolt him into the wilderness and keep him there."

"But they won't."

"I rather think they will."

"But it's a scandal."

"It's life, struggle. What's his future? Nothing—probably—unless he can get on the staff. And three-quarters of the influence is against him. I could name three or four who won't have him on at any price. Isn't it always so?"

"In politics—perhaps."

"Oh, everywhere—to some extent. Besides, Hazzard's poor. He lives on coaching fools. He may go on like this for years, a brilliant drudge, eating his heart out, obscure, without a patient. Dozens of men have tried it and been broken."

Moorhouse looked thoughtful.

"Somehow—I have a feeling that he won't be broken. He'll get into Harley Street—in spite of them. I suppose there are some men on the staff—you, for instance."

"I'm just a junior surgeon."

"At present. But later. And there are others."

The Scotchman rubbed his forehead.

"To be sure, I'll be ready to give him a hand. I don't know that I have any cause to love old Fanshawe and Tate and their likes. They made me eat some sandy porridge."

IV

One of Mr. Thomas Tate's dressers, opening the door of the bacteriological lab., saw a little figure in a white coat perched on a stool. Dr. Badger, the hospital bacteriologist, was away on his holiday, and Hazzard was deputizing for him. Said the young man, "Oh, Mr. Hazzard, Mr. Tate is asking for that report on No. 6 in 'George Ward.' "

Hazzard raised his head from the microscope.

"It wasn't due until to-morrow."

"I know nothing about that, sir. But Mr. Tate sent me to say——"

The lad was a nice lad, and he looked uncomfortable, and Hazzard, who had had experience of Mr. Thomas Tate's sudden fussi-

ness and furies, guessed that the dresser had been sent with a message that was abrupt and autocratic.

"Where is Mr. Tate?"

"In George Ward, sir."

"I'll come myself."

He went. He knew that he would find a little, pursy man with flowing, reddish moustachios, perched on a chair beside a bed, and hectoring everybody. At "Bennet's" Mr. Tom Tate was known as Tom-Tit or Sir Reginald Slapdash. He was a fussy, irascible, melodramatic little man, exceedingly vain and fond of creating an impression. Mr. Tate's lightning diagnoses were matters of common knowledge. He liked to pounce upon some student: "You—there, look at that breast. No, just use your eyes, young man. Now, what's the condition? Quick, out with it. The thing's obvious. Well, you, the next man. Be quick." That he perpetrated occasional inexactitudes was in the nature of things inevitable, for a flashy egotism must err, but Mr. Tate's errings were accepted by himself as the foibles of a great man. He possessed an amazing effrontery. After one of these swashbuckling adventures in surgery he would look the world in the face and exclaim, "Take note, my friends, even I—Tom Tate—can be deceived by fallacious signs and symptoms."

Hazzard found Mr. Tate as he had expected to find him, sitting by a patient's bed, and surrounded by dressers and students. He had that aggressive air that is assumed by a very little man; he held his head cockily; always he attacked. To see this minute bully perched on a chair and pulling the flowing redness of a fierce moustache was an eternal challenge to Hazzard. In the first place a surgeon should not have indulged in such flowing appendage. They were known in the hospital world as "Tate's flagellæ."

Mr. Tate had a regal air with junior members of the staff.

"Ah, Mr. Hazzard, we have been expecting that report. Not that it's of great significance. The thing's fairly obvious."

He made this speech after keeping Hazzard waiting and unacknowledged for quite two minutes.

Said Hazzard, "Then you don't need the report, sir?"

Mr. Tate took him up.

"I beg your pardon. We explore all alternatives. Obviously—this is a streptococcal infection. Obviously."

A little, shivering smile seemed to pass over the young faces round the bed. A breeze between Mr. Tate and Hazzard might be amusing. Also, there was a faint glimmer in Hazzard's eyes.

"Unfortunately, sir, I found no streptococci."

"What! You had better re-examine the specimen."

"I found bacillus coli, sir."

"Bacillus coli? Purely adventitious, purely adventitious. Wait, Dr. Badger is back to-morrow. Send down another specimen, Mr. Symes. I should like Dr. Badger to report."

Hazzard took the insult with quiet sang-froid.

"Is that all you require, sir?"

"Certainly."

The breeze and the flutter died away, and Hazzard went back to his lab. And next day Dr. Badger returned, and with no superabundance of love for Mr. Thomas Tate, sat down and proved him wrong.

"Bacillus coli," ran the report.

Mr. Tate read it, and made a sound like "Puff." These armchair fellows, who hadn't the courage to handle a knife, were always discovering mares' nests.

Chapter Sixteen

I

It was raining, a gentle, June shower falling softly upon the young foliage, and silvering the flower spikes of the tall grasses, but behind Sisbury the sky showed a patch of brilliant blue with white cumulus cloud piling up in the south-west. Hazzard loved such rain, the delicate and intimate patter of it, and the silence that seemed to fall with it. In Roper's Row rain would damp down so many of the discords, yelling children, gossiping voices, and even in this Wiltshire valley it seemed to press a moist and silencing hand over the ugliness of the human mouth. Hazzard had come down to Melfont for one of his occasional week-ends. His mother's cottage had remained exactly as it had been seven years ago. She was present in it still, with her chair standing where it had always stood; her very clothes had laid in the drawers or hung in her cupboard.

Mrs. Tribute, who—for the sum of three shillings and sixpence weekly, opened windows, and dusted furniture, and lit fires when necessary, had confessed herself worried by the dead woman's clothes.

"Won't have them touched, not he. And the moth be in them. Now, I ask 'ee, with them clothes full o' nasty maggots——"

She had importuned Christopher until he had come to agree with her, and one March day had made a sacred holocaust of his mother's clothes on a piece of ground close to one of her apple trees, and it had seemed to him that she had stood beside the fire, hands folded, dark eyes mysteriously smiling. He had been interrupted by two of the Prosser youths, young louts who looked all mouth and tufts of greasy hair. They had poked their heads over his hedge and guffawed.

"Burning th' old guy's clothes—be ye?"

Hazzard had taken no notice, but had remained with his back turned, staring at the fire that was a pyre of memories. He was learning to treat the Prossers of the world with indifference and an unseeing silence. Nothing confounds the vulgar so secretly as such a silence.

The Prossers had gone home and told their mother, and Mrs. Prosser had commented on Hazzard's meanness. "Leaving good

stuff to they maggots, when he might have helped to clothe some poor creature. Besides, don't we know he be as poor as a rat? Skimpin' and scrapin'. Clever 'e may be, but didn't I always tell 'ee no London lady would have him mawlin' of her."

But on this day of soft June rain Hazzard put on an old mackintosh, and with his head bare, climbed Sisbury, and sitting with his back to that old, familiar stone, looked out over the green world. He saw the river and the hills and the beech woods, and the blue grey distances, and white scars that were chalk pits, and the lush meadows, and his mother's cottage, and the corner of the churchyard where she lay. He could overlook the Prossers' farm, and the thatched roofs of Melfont, but if he looked at the Prossers' farm it was with the eyes of a man observing a culture of germs on a plate of agar-agar. The Prossers were—just growth, and gross at that. Had you spilled crude nitric acid over them something unpleasant would have been eliminated. So thought Hazzard.

For, at this period, he felt ruthless to certain aspects of life. He was both child and fanatic, physician and judge, creator and destroyer. He could slave for the sick and sensitive, but he could have wiped out Prosserdom without a quiver of compunction. They were like a knot of fat worms in a dunghill. He allowed that they had their uses.

At Melfont Hazzard did much thinking. It was as though he brought from London a whole brainful of facts and data and observations and sorted them out in Mary Hazzard's garden beside the softly flowing Avon. Also he used his imagination upon the facts that he had tested and accumulated, that intuitive foreseeing vision that makes the dry dust live. Without imagination he would have been a little pedant, a mere scholarly person. He saw far and he saw deep. He could be content with nothing but causation. He was one of those observers and thinkers who had come to believe that the mere cutting at flesh with a knife was futile, and that the future lay with the watcher of cell life. The microscope, the culture dish, and the cell, and the cell's products. He was following Pasteur and Koch, but not as a sedulous copyist. He would originate new methods while carrying on the same inspiration. His world was a world of sera, antitoxins, ferments, anti-bodies. There were the bacteria that still eluded the microscope's eye. There was cancer.

But on Sisbury—in the calmness of some such wet green day—he saw himself as a child playing on the edge of the great, mysterious sea. Never had he lost his sense of mystery. He was not the slave of the text-books. Nor did he assume that when you had ob-

served a sequence of phenomena and pasted a label over them you could boast that you knew all about them. His was one of the earliest of the scientific minds to escape from the materialistic dogmatism of the late nineteenth century. He was a hill man, and the son of his mother. Nor was he much of a metaphysician, or for attaching a hypothetical thread to a hypothetical star and trying to climb it. There seemed to him to be no thread that was adequate. He worked and watched and wondered. Like Fabre he had a mental humility; his conceit did not demand the abolition of God.

Also from the top of Sisbury he could look out towards his own future and the web whose intricacies contained it—even London. He had no illusions. He knew that he was suspect, a disturber of professional peace. He was too ruthless an inquirer, and the questions that he asked had been answered by the old men, who were troubled when he asked these questions over again. They had replied, "It is So-and-so," and he had stood up and asked them "Why?" and to such new questionings there may be but one retort: "Because I say it is so." That was one of the things that had astonished Hazzard, the average man's tacit acceptance of the printed word. He could not remember a fellow-student questioning the statements in a text-book. A text-book was as final to the average man as a paragraph in a halfpenny paper is to the busman or the cook.

He could recall an incident, an occasion when he had dared to confess himself unconvinced by one of old Sir Dighton's threadbare theories.

"But I don't quite see, sir, how the facts can be explained by——"

Old Dighton, suddenly choleric and staring, had snubbed him.

"Ah, you don't see? Well, wait ten years, Mr. Hazzard, your vision may improve."

Obviously, his seniors were not likely to find pleasure in his disturbing curiosity. It was very natural; it was history. No doubt he appeared to them as an impudent and inquisitive little boy who was irrepressible, and came out cheekily with "I beg to differ, sir." Not that he was so blatantly contradicting. He could be silent but not servile, and his silence was rather like the silence of an iceberg on the point of toppling over and squashing some little shipload of theory. He was condemned as a prig, and knew it, and he also knew that he was not a prig. He was just a fiercely inspired searcher.

But they would keep him out—some of these older men—if they

had their way. They would suppress him; they would expose him to years of poverty and obscurity and heartbreak, until—in his shabby weariness—he would cease to ask questions, and conform.

II

On that very same June evening Mr. Thomas Tate and his wife dined with Sir Dighton and Lady Fanshawe. They were old friends. They did the same things and took the same morning paper. Mrs. Tate, large and red, was expecting very soon to be addressed as "Your Ladyship." The Fanshawes were taking the Tates to His Majesty's Theatre, and while the ladies went up to put on their cloaks, old Fanshawe had a second glass of port.

"Try another glass, Tom; it's good old stuff. I've had it twenty years."

Mr. Tate fell.

"Well—to-night. I have to think of my hands. By the way, what about that vacancy?"

Sir Dighton filled his glass.

"When Berringer retires."

"Next year. Lampson will go up. There will be a vacancy on the medical side."

Fanshawe replaced the decanter with a gesture of emphasis.

"There is one man who is not eligible as far as I am concerned."

"Hazzard?"

"I rather think so."

"Oh, certainly. Little vulgar faddist. Against all our traditions, my dear fellow. The chap has no breed and no *nous*."

Old Fanshawe raised his glass, and sipped.

"We'll keep him off, Tom. People grumble about out professional traditions. These very traditions save the credulous idiots from being exploited by any fanatic with a new fancy."

"Exactly. I suppose we shall have a majority on the board?"

"I rather think so. Yes, my dear, coming, coming."

III

If Hazzard was a very lonely man, his tenant on the first floor was equally so, and they shared in No. 7 Roper's Row a somewhat similar solitude. Mr. Crapp had every right to be considered an oddity, and though neither man liked the other, it could be described as a case of symbiosis. Moreover, Hazzard had grown accustomed to this person, whom Mrs. Duggan described as "A

bottle full of sour milk," and nine-tenths of the machinery of life is habit. It may be that Hazzard preferred Crapp's acidity, his complete human sterility, his absence of humour, for the fellow was so negative that he did not obstruct the positive in Hazzard. Also, Somerset House piqued Christopher's sense of mischief. To provoke Mr. Crapp's philosophy was like teasing a stag-beetle by holding a wooden match close to its pincers, a harmless sport. And Crapp—too—in his way was a fanatic, a curious, cold, sarcastic creature full of secretions that had turned sour.

They smoked occasional pipes together, and Hazzard, whose whole life was spent in observing details, noticed Bob Crapp's queer little ways. He had a curious trick with matches. He never threw a used match aside, but put the stick back in a box, either for future use when a fire was burning, or because he was incapable of throwing things away. He wore slips of white paper over his shirt-cuffs to protect them. He used a very old coat and deplorable slippers. He polished his own black boots, which were flat and narrow and of immense length, using some particular concoction of his own, soot from his chimney mixed with a little olive oil.

The man was a mass of suspicion. You had only to listen to him for half an hour to realize his attitude of disbelief, his curious, cold mistrust. The politicians lied, the Press lied, John Citizen lied, all women lied. Nothing was right; every lawyer was venal. He might have, too, suspected Hazzard of "coining" or keeping an illicit still in that locked room on the top landing, where he had no business to be. Hazzard, who was amused, offered to show him his laboratory.

Somerset House had its excuse ready.

"That woman has mislaid my boots. Thought they might be up here—by mistake."

Hazzard's boots being sevens and Mr. Crapp's elevens, the suggestion was unconvincing.

"Would you care to see my lab.?"

Mr. Crapp's dignity, caught in an undignified adventure, seemed to grow out of its collar. His throat, with its prominent Adam's apple, lengthened visibly.

"Ha, 'the holy of holies.' Certainly."

Hazzard took him in, and he stood on his long shanks like a secretary-bird, trying to look wise. He said "ha" many times, and ejaculated the obvious—"Test-tubes, dear me, test-tubes. A microscope."—"Chemistry—I presume?" There was a slide on the microscope stage, and Hazzard adjusted the condenser and focused the instrument.

"Care to look?"

Mr. Crapp, closing an eye with two fingers, bent his long back.

"Do you see anything?"

"Not yet."

"Continue to look."

Somerset House became suspicious even when looking down a microscope. Hazzard might be fooling him.

"I do see certain little objects."

"Things rather like drumsticks?"

"Yes, I might describe them thus."

"Tetanus bacilli," said Hazzard, "the nice little fellows who give you lock-jaw."

Mr. Crapp said "Ha," and straightened as though one of the bacilli had jumped up to bite him.

"How very interesting. But isn't it rather dangerous?"

Hazzard smiled.

"It might be to people who meddled. You see I'm a student of bugs; I hunt bugs."

Somerset House broke into one of its rare smiles, a falling of the lower jaw with much exposure of very artificial teeth.

"There's a resemblance. You hunt bacteria, I hunt gold bugs. Ha, ha."

It was a joke, a Crappism, and as such Hazzard let it pass.

Bob Crapp was a great walker. He spent Saturday afternoons and a large part of Sundays in strolling on his long legs through the suburbs, and he walked with a purpose. He played a game invented by himself, and it took the form of spying for his own amusement and for some other man's possible discomfort. He would select half a dozen names and addresses, with their respective income-tax figures jotted down, and set out to discover the type of house that Mr. Smith of Hampstead, or Mr. Jones of Highgate, or Mr. Robinson of St. John's Wood occupied. If the style of the house and the sum paid by Mr. Smith in income-tax did not appear to be in sympathy, Crapp would visit that particular street or terrace or crescent on successive Sundays, and endeavour to obtain glimpses of Mr. Smith's mode of living. Did he keep a car? Did he entertain? How many children had he? How did his wife dress? It was a curious form of relaxation this aping of the part of a private inquiry agent, but it amused Crapp, and appeared to give expression to the man's grudgings and envyings. He was just an underling in Government service, but this hunting of "gold bugs," as he called them, fed and satisfied his starved

sense of self-importance. Here was some fat fellow with much money; go to, now let us play the taxidermist. Yet Mr. Crapp's peerings over garden walls to see whether Mr. Smith had a tennis-court or a stable, and his patrolling of suburban roads, were not wholly without result. He did succeed in making two or three more fortunate fellows feel uncomfortable. Hints were passed on. Some succulent Smith was rendered suspect.

IV

Split the resultant of the force of "contrast," and you get emulation and envy, and yet when Hazzard travelled down to Winchester and passed Saturday night in Moorhouse's home he fell neither to the virtue nor the vice. Here was a garden with a white statue glimmering against a gloom of yews, and flowers trailing from old lead vases, and a lawn upon which yellow leaves lay softly. The wife was Phyllis, the daughter, Joan. The drawing-room with its white, bay Georgian window had one nucleus of colour which caught Hazzard's eye at the first moment, a cabinet of red lacquer. It was a soft and sombre-coloured room, opening to the garden and the sunlight, with that red cabinet glowing like a gem. Books lay about. The little lady who sat on the sofa as though poised in the cup of a water-lily, loved china and flowers and old miniatures. There was much china in the room, delicate stuff, little points of colour that caught the light; and always some perfume pervaded the room's peace.

And Moorhouse was there, brown and easy and teasing, telling his small daughter absurd stories, and meeting his wife's dark eyes with mischievous solemnity. From the first Hazzard divined a very beautiful understanding between them. They were at their leisure together. They and their house were the products of centuries of deliberate, happy, easy living, with all vulgar over-emphasis and crude self-expression eliminated. Even laughter in such a house recalled two or three soft, yet piquant notes struck on a piano, whereas in Roper's Row there might be belchings, and screams, and giggles that suggested coarse sexual interplay.

As Hazzard saw it, Moorhouse's home was woman. And this particular woman, this happy, vital creature with her flowers and her music and her china, caused Hazzard to pause for a moment and to consider those other aspects of life. Obviously, woman did add to the graciousness of life, and since the death of his mother, Christopher's world had been empty of woman. His work was sexless. In it there was no breaking of spears at the barriers, no throw-

ing of garlands. It was work done in secret, without the perfume of applause.

Walking with his friend in the garden after dinner he had touched on personal things.

"You must be happy here, Julian."

Yes, Moorhouse was happy, though man in his restlessness may be aware of the walls of his garden. Hazzard noticed that he turned his face towards the big window, and that a shaded light was burning, and his wife's dark head was visible. Moorhouse's face had both the beginnings and the endings of a smile.

"Sanctuary,—Master Christopher. It's so very clean in there, and she's so gentle."

They were close to the white statue of Diana in her recess of sheltering yews.

"Not the huntress type, old man. If man is man he doesn't want the huntress. Why don't you marry?"

Hazzard stood at gaze, looking rather like a man who has been asked why he does not own Mount Ararat.

"I? It doesn't come into my life—somehow. Never will."

Moorhouse looked at him queerly.

"You mean there is no room?"

"Oh, very likely. Mine is a celibate sort of job. Some jobs are."

Chapter Seventeen

I

CHRISTOPHER HAZZARD'S most happy mornings were those Tuesday and Friday mornings when he attended as out-patient physician at the Marylebone Hospital for Sick Children.

Not being a sentimentalist, and perhaps because of it, he was very successful in his handling of children. A sick child moved him as other men are moved by a woman or a piece of music or a flower, for he himself had known what it was to be a sick child, and the memories had been burnt into his body. To begin with, he never lied to a child. He never pretended that something was not going to hurt when he knew that it would hurt. He was gentle and deliberate and friendly, and there is a quiet frankness that children understand.

The Hazzard of the Marylebone Hospital for Sick Children differed from the Hazzard of "Bennet's." He seemed to shed a hard, defensive skin. He could smile, betray a man's compassionate playfulness, put out a finger for some little puny creature to clutch. He was different, too, with the women, mothers and nurses; they had ceased to be sexless abstractions; they were women, mothers and nurses. And to them he was very much a man, Dr. Christopher Hazzard, liked, trusted, quoted. He had a reputation. Women in back streets would advise each other. There was a little doctor at the "Marylebone" who was a bit of a wizard with the kids.

Hazzard, with some little wizened thing lying on his knee, and looking up with its funny monkey eyes into his face, had what a certain mother had called "The Christ's look." His hands were very gentle. It was rare for a sick child to be afraid of him, and the fear did not last. Screamings and strugglings did occur, but they were symptomatic of the fool mother and of the child who had been spoilt; yet even with the nastiest of little egoists Hazzard was extraordinarily patient. Sometimes he would send the mother of such a child back to the waiting-room.

"Temper wastes time. You have not spent enough time on your child's temper. Come back in half an hour."

Occasionally he did meet a child that struggled and yelled itself into a frenzy, and would not be touched or persuaded. It would seem to be possessed of an evil spirit, and Hazzard would deal

very differently with such a brat. He would use fear to master it. He would send the mother out of the room, and he and the nurse together would coerce the little unchastened savage. It was for the child's good. There are children and adults who need the domination of fear.

But nearly all sick children loved him, he the most lonely and unloved of men.

Conversely, many of his sick children were the victims of tuberculosis, glands, spine, or bowel, and the tuberculous child's delicacy of tissue is associated so often with a delicacy of spirit. These sensitive little creatures were so unlike the bull children, they lacked the vulgarity and the crude self-assertion of the lout and the wench. They were not smirched by sex. To Hazzard they were like little pale flowers, while much of humanity was to him mere butcher's meat. He had all the scorn of the young sensitive for the blockish, bellowing cattle of the streets.

These children moved him, but for much of humanity he had no pity. He had been hunted by the herd. If in its grossness and its gourmandism and its lechery it fell sick he was ready to minister to it with his skill, coldly and efficiently, but without compassion. He was quite unmoved by the crowd's conventional cries. He did not believe that the dustman was a simple son of toil, kinder and less selfish than the duke. He did not believe in the sound sense of the simplest people. His work brought him too much in contact with the crowd's extraordinary complacency and its ignorance. When a woman of the people said to him, "I don't hold with so-and-so, doctor," he was moved to reply, "You hold nothing. You are no more than a husk of flesh and foolishness." He was neither an altruist nor an optimist. He observed things as they displayed themselves to him. He was a mystical realist. He studied the mass we call civilization much as he studied a colony of cocci.

Great men are not seen in the making; they arrive; nor was Hazzard conscious in himself of elements of greatness. His work was his god. Yet he had glimpses of those other great men, and he could view them without bitterness, and on his way back from Marylebone he would walk down Harley Street. And here, outside Sir Dighton Fanshawe's glowing green door, stood Sir Dighton's new French car. Cars were becoming the mode, and the colour of Sir Dighton's car was a sunny scarlet.

"The royal chariot," thought Christopher, and passed on, wondering whether such successes and their materializations satisfied old Dighton. Did such a man sit down ever and cut a section of himself and place it under the microscope?

Further east, where the amenities of life were less gracious, and where that wonderful and horrible word amenity could be applied, Hazzard could contrast east with west. Not that Toothill Street was either east or gorgeous, but Hazzard traversed it most days of the week. Toothill Street was frowsy and full of warehouses and vans and bales of goods and packing-cases and litter. Trams ran along it and scrooped and wailed where a particularly sharp curve made them wag their tails. Also there were many public-houses, and sodden women with jugs, and yelling children. Fights were frequent in and about Toothill Street, and Hazzard had seen women looking like cases of acute dementia, clawing at each other's faces and tearing out hanks of hair.

Often Hazzard passed along Toothill Street about the dinner hour when groups of young wenches idled outside the warehouses, hatless, chattering, poking fun at everything and everybody. There would be sudden screams and squirls of laughter. In fine weather the midday meal—such as it was—was taken al fresco on the pavement. There was a jamminess about these meals and about the ladies' fingers, and there was one young woman with very black, kinky hair who had a passion for tomatoes. She sucked them, lips everted, so that her mouth appeared to be extruding some monstrous red growth.

On this particular day Hazzard came under the fire of one of these street "salons." Without realizing it he had become a familiar figure, something solemnly ridiculous, and so unlike Toothill Street, that Toothill Street, being vulgar English, giggled and screamed at anything that was not Toothill. The young lady of the tomatoes, having failed to attract Hazzard's attention on other occasions, put herself half in front of him, and pointing a finger and removing a half-sucked tomato from her mouth, gave tongue.

"Blimy, what a fice!"

Hazzard, with apparent indifference, carried his countenance past her to the accompaniment of screams of laughter. Someone who had been eating a wedge of beefsteak pudding, threw a lump of wet, gravyish suet after him. It hit him in the middle of the back—and stuck.

There were more screams.

"Take it 'ome and bile it."

II

Hazzard was taking Dr. Salisbury's out-patients.

The room in which Hazzard sat in the centre of a half-circle of

students, had two windows and three doors, a table for the clinical clerk, and a long bench for the waiting patients. The walls of the room were painted a dark red below and cream above, and the faces of the sick people on the bench stood out like dabs of putty against the dark red dado. Hazzard had his back to one of the Georgian windows, and directly in front of him and the students stood the patient's chair.

Hazzard, leaning forward with his stethoscope applied to a woman's chest, was a little listening figure in a room full of silent people. The out-patient nurse held the folds of a blanket aside, and looked out of the window. Students, some twenty of them, posed in varying attitudes on the very hard and very polished kitchen-chairs, watched Hazzard, or anything that was worth observing among the waiting girls and women on the bench. The woman whose chest Hazzard was auscultating, stared straight before her with an air of anxious breathlessness.

Someone began to cough, a large female with a fiery face and a black bonnet cocked aggressively. A string-bag full of purchases lying in her lap looked like some monstrous growth. Her coughing was loud and brassy and assertive, and Hazzard, without removing his stethoscope or looking at the lady, called for silence.

"Stop that coughing, please. It is quite unnecessary."

The red-faced woman gave him an outraged look, and a shrugging glance at each of her neighbours.

"I can't help it, doctor."

"Oh, yes, you can. Otherwise you will have to wait outside till the end of the afternoon."

Obviously the lady could help it. She tossed her black bonnet, and gave a heave to her string-bag, for it appeared that the doctor was one of those nasty, unsympathetic persons to whom you were not allowed to advertise your ailment. And Hazzard, in a voice that was quiet and intimate, commented on that cough to the students, but his words were not audible to the patients at the other end of the room.

"You may make the generalization, gentlemen, the more noisy the cough, the less serious the ailment. In a man you might postulate too much alcohol and tobacco."

The half-circle smiled. Some wag asked a question.

"Never—in the other sex, sir?"

Hazzard gave the questioner an ironic side-glance.

"In the case in question—one of the ingredients—probably."

In this London portrait gallery a little pale pastel of a face hung next to the inflamed and sodden countenance of the woman with

the string-bag. There are faces that suggest the moon reflected in still water, or a lamp shining through dark foliage, faces of strange sensitiveness. This girl wore black; her dark hair was gathered in plaits over her ears; she was very pale, her skin the colour of ivory, and yet its pallor had a soft and milky bloom. Sitting there pinned between the red-faced woman and a Jewess of large proportions, she watched Hazzard with eyes whose whites had a faint, bluish tinge. She looked fragile, and frightened. Possibly she was too easily affected by her environment and reacted to happenings that left the grosser women on either side of her unmoved.

In fact she did make a little, shuddering movement as though to escape from between her two well-fleshed neighbours, but the impulse seemed to die away. She sat and watched Hazzard as though her dread of the whole business was penetrated by surprise. Surely it was an astonishing coincidence! She was moved both to run and to stay. She could not but help being aware of that half-circle of young male faces, and of the eyes that looked at her, searching her out as something dainty and attractive in the midst of all that coarsened, middle-aged flesh. But she was like a shy child, amazingly virginal in spite of London, and perhaps because of London. An inherited quality continues. The old country sage who talked of silk purses and sow's ears may have waded deeper into biology than many of the microscope men.

The Jewess glanced at her neighbour, for her neighbour was restless.

"Tired of waiting, my dear?"

The thick voice was kind, the dark eyes the eyes of Rachel. The girl answered the whisper.

"Do we have to undress—before——?"

"In one of those liddle rooms."

"With the nurse?"

"They pud a blanget over you."

"We ought not to talk, ought we?"

She became very silent and still, wedged in like a child between those two big, warm odoriferous bodies. Once or twice she closed her eyes, and kept them shut, and then opened them suddenly upon Hazzard as though she expected to find him looking at her. Surely he would see and remember? And could she face it? But why should she be afraid? She had come to be helped and it was his business to help people.

The woman with the blanket over her shoulders had been shepherded by the nurse into one of the little rooms or cubicles. Three

or four students had left their chairs and followed her. The girl turned an inquiring face to the Jewess.

"Do—they—examine you too?"

"You have to be messed aboud—a liddle. The young docdors must learn."

The girl appeared to shrink back between the two stout women.

"I didn't know."

She became aware of Hazzard glancing in her direction. Of course—she was chattering, and he expected silence. Her sensitive face seemed to close its petals. Surely he was staring rather hard at her? Did he remember? A sudden warmth tinted her pale face. She shut her eyes, and tried to feel that these happenings had to be accepted even as other things had to be accepted.

Slowly, the women who were before her on the bench were dealt with, and she watched the same process repeated. The lady with the string-bag, breaking into volubility directly she occupied the patient's chair, allowed the whole room to be informed. "I get such a 'orrible sinkin' feelin', doctor, and my feet swell o' nights. And when the coughin' catches me——" She was off at a gallop, but was not allowed to go far, being turned aside from the path of wasteful garrulity. Hazzard, observing her for a moment with merciless and searching eyes, and seeing that greasy, mottled skin, and the inflamed cheeks, and the tremor of the hands, was wise as to her trouble. "Go into that room with the nurse." Removed so curtly she heaved herself up and went, balked of her splurgings, and presently the girl heard Hazzard's voice and the woman's in one of the little inner rooms. She could not hear what Hazzard said, but she could hear the woman's protests.

"Not more than three 'alf-pints a day, doctor. That's the trooth. Not a drop more, 'pon me 'onour."

In a little while Hazzard came out, closing the door after him, and with the air of a man who had no time to waste on the rotten and hopeless, sat down in his chair.

"Next."

The girl started, and rose to her feet. She was being stared at by all these young men, and her face had the quality of broken flickering light. With eyes downcast she crossed the big room and sat down in the chair. She had her out-patient letter in her hand.

She saw Hazzard's hand come out for the letter.

"May I have this? Thank you."

His voice had a gentleness. She raised her eyes to his face, and found him regarding her fixedly. Then he glanced at the name on the letter.

"Yes, what is your trouble?"

She was very conscious of all those young faces, and of that sudden look in Hazzard's eyes that had suggested recognition. She flushed; her eyelids flickered; she was mute, confused.

"I—I get so short of breath. I think it's my heart."

His steady eyes observed her.

"Palpitation?"

"Yes."

"Do much standing?"

"No, sitting. I'm a cashier."

"I see."

He passed the letter to his clerk.

"I will examine your heart. Go into that room on the right. The nurse will come to you."

III

The cubicle measured some ten feet by six. It contained nothing but a leather-covered couch, a hospital blanket, and a chair; and its walls were painted in the same colours as the walls of the out-patient room. High up in one wall a narrow window let in a little light.

The girl, having closed the white door, and shut herself into this tank, sat down on the couch, and with uncertain fingers unfastened the front of her black blouse. Her dark eyes looked like two circles of shadow in her very pale face. She had the air of a timid creature oppressed by strange surroundings, and almost afraid to move. But her stillness was inward. It had the poise of a question. Had he recognized her? Had he forgotten everything?

The nurse bustled in, a young woman with freckles.

"Now then—get ready."

The girl's eyes protested.

"I am ready."

"That's no use. Things off to the waist. Hurry up. The doctor will be in in a moment."

She assisted. She reinforced the girl's unwilling hands, and when the white shape of her was naked to the waist, she picked up the hospital blanket that had been flung over the back of the chair, and covered the girl's shoulders. The same blanket had covered other shoulders, and the girl was aware of it. Her skin seemed to creep and to tingle.

"Shall I have to go—out there?"

The nurse was a practical person.

"Don't be silly. This is a hospital. If you are a case—well—yes, probably."

The white door opened as she finished speaking, and Hazzard entered, to close the door after him, and to stand for one significant moment looking at the slip of womanhood seated on the couch. Her two hands held the grey blanket like two ivory clasps, so that it covered her bosom. She looked up at him with flickering lashes. Her virginal timidity somehow made him think of aspen leaves. And suddenly he was aware of her apartness, her flowerlike face so different from the coarse and bloated mask of that other woman. She waited there rather like a child, a sick and sensitive child, expecting him to help her.

He had his stethoscope in his hand. He drew the chair forward, and rested one foot on it, his lame foot. He spoke to the nurse.

"Switch on the light, please."

Two electric bulbs filled the little room with pale, yellow light. He said, "I remember you quite well. Now, tell me—everything, the things that are troubling you."

Her fingers appeared to draw the folds of the blanket tighter.

"I get so tired. And palpitation. And sometimes I have pain after meals."

"Indoors all day?"

"From nine till six."

"And half an hour for dinner, and ten minutes for tea."

"Yes."

"And—your diet consists of buns and milk and bread and margarine, and jam sandwich and sardines."

Her eyes seemed to widen.

"Oh, but we get meat."

"You don't eat much of it."

"No. It's rather——"

"Quite. Now, I want to look."

He examined her lips, and drew down an eyelid. She was so obviously anæmic, and her beautiful, soft pallor was that of a flower that opens its petals at night. She was shut away from the sunlight.

"Now, your chest."

The nurse stepped forward to remove the blanket, but Hazzard repulsed her. He raised a fold, and adjusting his stethoscope, placed the mouthpiece under the girl's left breast. She sat very still like a child, her eyes at gaze. His face was very close to one of her hands. He noticed the delicate texture of skin and fingers, and the cleanness of nails.

His examination was brief but thorough. He listened to the breath sounds at each apex.

"No cough?"

"No."

He straightened, drew back a step, removed his stethoscope, and observed her. His expression was the same as when he looked at one of his sick children, a gentle and half-smiling sheen. He did not realize it.

"Anæmia, lack of red blood. That's your trouble, Miss Avery. You can dress again. I'll come back when you are dressed."

IV

When he returned the little black shape of her was seated on the chair. The nurse, suppressing freckled curiosity, stood by the head of the couch. In the out-patient room someone had made a joke, "Fancy old Blizzard keeping the one pretty thing to himself." There was the buzz of subdued murmurings. Hazzard stood leaning one shoulder against the wall.

"I want to ask you a few questions."

She looked up at him consentingly, and with a kind of wide-eyed shyness.

"Yes."

"Where do you work?"

"At Petter & Gom's in Oxford Street."

"Cashier?"

"Yes. In the silks and fancy."

"Glass box?"

"Yes."

"Do you live in?"

"Yes."

He made a movement of the head.

"Do you get out at all?"

"A little—in the evening."

"Bedroom to yourself?"

"No, with another girl. It's very small."

"Exactly. Now, would it be possible for you to get out of that glass case?"

She looked up at him with poignant helplessness. Her eyes said, "How can I get out of it? I have to live. Aren't we all—shut up in glass cases?"

His eyes softened.

"I see. I'll give you a tonic. Come twice a week. Petter & Gom's —you said——"

"Yes, Dr. Hazzard."

He looked at her, smiled faintly, and turned to open the door. He was aware of a feeling of acute dissatisfaction.

"I'll write to your firm."

She looked frightened, and he caught the look as he turned.

"But—they—might——"

"I see."

His feeling of dissatisfaction, his sense of scratching at the surface of things, became a sudden and strange anger. A tonic, something in a bottle! What rot—what humbug! And yet—what could you do? Smash every pane of plate glass in London? The world had to be re-educated, made to realize that life was the great business, not business—life.

V

As Hazzard climbed the stairs of No. 7 he paused for a moment on the upper landing; he experienced one of those moments of self-awareness when a man sees himself as he was yesterday and is to-day. Had he changed much, and had certain things grown rather dim? He did not think so, though his mother was—perhaps—more of a picture than a presence. He worked in the room in which she had died.

But it was a curious coincidence that Ruth Avery should have turned up at Dr. Salisbury's out-patients' on the day he happened to be deputizing for him. Poor little beggar! She seemed to have changed not at all in seven years. And then he remembered the abruptness of her leaving No. 7, and that her disappearance had been rather convenient, in that it had enabled him to rent two rooms instead of one. How purely personal life was. So much of it demonstrates as a matter of pique or of convenience. Opinions are mostly prejudices. And you inherited likes and dislikes, nauseas, urges, perfumes.

He glanced at his watch. He had half an hour before his evening meal and an hour's coaching of the dull and the indifferent, and it was late August and hot, the season when people should be away at the seaside. He took no holidays, but on such occasion he would ascend by his ladder through the trap in the roof, and sit and meditate among the chimney-pots. It was possible to be supremely alone in London, and to do or think things of significance and distinction a man must be much alone.

He slipped into an old coat, and climbing through the trap-door to the strip of leaded roof he picked up the old can that he kept there for watering his pots and boxes. The sun shone through an

evening haze of heat and smoke. Distances spread themselves, a grey expanse broken by the up-jutting green of the trees in the Bloomsbury squares. He stood holding the can and gazing as he might have gazed from Sisbury.

But his consciousness found itself centred upon the face of the sick child of the afternoon. Yes, she was just like a child. And suddenly he remembered how she had helped to nurse him, and that he had not been very grateful.

Queer thing—life. Nine hours a day spent in a glass box. Of course she was anæmic. But wasn't it rather damnable! Birds shut up in cages. How he had abhorred the thought of a cage, and had fought against all cages, and had set himself to be free. He was free—in a sense. He had this little platform, this ascetic's pillar. But if he could open all the cages? Yes, but was not the crowd fated to be caged? It was better caged. Though there were people, the few, a child here and there, to whom your compassion turned. Like that girl.—She was so flowerlike.

Chapter Eighteen

I

In those days someone on the directorate of Messrs. Petter & Gom's happened to be troubled with a conscience. Possibly it was young Augustus Gom, a dyspeptic, and who had married a wife with a Roman nose, fierce blue eyes, and a mouth that was lipless. Young Gom, urged by his wife, initiated reforms in the housing and feeding of the firm's employees. Young Gom's wife had no children and much of militant energy, and her passions were the franchise and the ordering of other people's morals. In Petter & Gom's she agitated for and caused young Gom to organize a complete segregation of the sexes. There were separate dining-rooms for the staff, separate common-rooms, and of course separate sleeping quarters. A partition erected in the passage of the top floor made it impossible for the male to approach the female. Also, a very capable and strong-minded housekeeper went the rounds, and saw to it that everything was in order.

Mrs. Augustus Gom, like so many women of her type, had serious limitations. Her glance was fixed upon the sex apparatus. She did not consider the body as a whole, the head, the stomach, lungs and feet. With her it was a question of morals, niceness, the sexual respectability—and is there any other form of respectability in England? She was not curious about the kitchen, or ventilation, or recreation, or varicose veins, or those periods when a woman suffers as a woman. She had the mentality of the female bureaucrat with that form of interfering egotism that is sometimes called altruism.

The female assistants slept two in a room, and Ruth's mate was plump and red-headed and eager for life. Every girl who went out after the closing hour had to return by ten and to sign her name in a book kept by the housekeeper. Florrie Barter would be in by ten, but rather breathlessly so, to rush upstairs and flop down on her bed. She was a girl who was always ready to giggle. She had no mystery, and no reserve.

Ruth, as a rule, was in bed by ten, for she was very tired at night, and she had a strange fear of the streets, for to her they were places where you were hunted. Men waited and followed you out, men who had been shut up all day with other men. Or men

loitered and stared in your face, or shadowed you, and some of the old men were the worst. "Good evening, dearie." Accosted, spoken to by old fellows whose sentimental sex slaver seemed to ooze down into their beards, she had fled, cold and shivering and frightened.

By way of friendliness she had begun by asking Florrie where she had been.

"Oh, out with a boy."

The response had a sameness, an inevitableness. It was as natural as Florrie's sex. Since you could not meet a man on common ground in the basement of Petter & Gom's you met him in the street, and after all a dark street was more exciting.

Once and once only Ruth had asked another question.

"Aren't you afraid?"

Florrie had stared, and then dissolved into giggles.

"You—are—a funny one! I wasn't born yesterday. I make 'em behave—to a point."

Ruth, tucked up in her narrow little bed, and often with a stale and perfunctory supper lying heavy upon her soul, would wonder at Florrie's boldness. Her room mate was such an audacious animal, whereas Ruth had never grown away from a kind of shrinking from raw sex. It had shocked her as a child, and it shocked her still; not that she was a prude, for prudery is nastiness, but she had a strange, sensitive, fastidious nature. She loved flowers, and pretty fabrics, and kittens, and a sentimental book. Fragile, simple creature that she was there was yet a something in her that had refused to surrender to man, perhaps because she had divined the turgid selfishness of most male emotion. She was pretty and she had heard the cry, "I want you," but always she had been strangely wide awake, a kind of little London Cassandra. "I want your body—not you." Though she could not put things into words. She had feelings, shrinkings, intuitions. Sex scared her; she seemed to have inward and prophetic glimpses of its implications. It was like a dark passage, or some shabby waste place where lean and hungry things prowled to catch you.

The vicissitudes of her own career had made Ruth very amenable to the decrees of a female bureaucrat such as Mrs. Augustus Gom. She shrank and obeyed. Her fear was to find herself workless, and upon the streets, and scurrying to and fro like a little frightened animal in search of a sheltering hole. Almost her dread of unemployment and of the streets made her a little sycophant, a tame creature, sedulously obedient.

That was why she feared to be ill, and why she had given up her

one free day in the month to visiting "Bennet's" Hospital. She had said nothing to anybody about it, not even to Florrie Barter. She had smuggled her bottle of medicine into the place wrapped up in an evening paper. Women employees were supposed to report any indisposition to the housekeeper, when they would be seen by the doctor who attended the staff, but Ruth dreaded being officially sick. She might be discharged. Besides, she was not really ill. She was anæmic, and at "Bennet's" they had given her a tonic.

She had hidden the bottle away in her chest of drawers, and had drunk one dose of the medicine on coming to bed. The label on the bottle advised her that the medicine was to be taken after meals, and she did not see how this could be managed save at night, for the staff was not supposed to visit its bedrooms between eight in the morning and six at night. She did not want to take the bottle downstairs and so advertise the fact to everybody that she was taking medicine. She supposed that she might be able to manage two surreptitious doses a day, one—early—before breakfast, and the other—after supper.

On this particular night she had come to bed early, for the day's most singular coincidence had to be reflected upon. In visiting the hospital she had not foreseen a possible meeting with Hazzard, and as a matter of fact she had not had Hazzard in her mind. Seven years had elapsed, and though nothing very important had happened to her, the unhappy trifles of her monotonous little life had filled her consciousness. She had thought sometimes of the days at Roper's Row and had regretted them, for there she had been seven years younger, and had had a room of her own, and leanings towards a possible [illegible] She had grown accustomed to the greyness of life, much as one grows accustomed to the English weather. She was thirty-one, and a prisoner. But, to her, Hazzard had reappeared in the guise of a great man. He gave orders. She had sat and gazed at him like a child, appreciating his air of confidence and of authority. No longer did he appear to her as a man to be pitied.

Also, he had remembered her. And he had been kind and considerate. She had realized the gentleness of his touch. He had not thrown her to those young men to be pawed and auscultated.

She supposed that she would not see him again. She might manage to bribe one of the shop boys to go and fetch her medicine, but she could not go herself until her one free day arrived, unless she made it known officially that she was attending as a patient at "Bennet's." There would be questions. Why this—why that? She would be treated with official suspicion. She had known

girls who had had to sneak away to hospitals or to private doctors because of "trouble" and who had been found out. Dismissal had followed. The soul of Mrs. Augustus Gom prevailed. Had she not come down and lectured to the female members of the staff, a pale, strenuous, dead-eyed woman with her beaked nose and lipless mouth? Someone had christened her irreverently "Cold Mutton Fat." Mrs. Augustus Gom laid great stress on social discipline. People were to behave like sheep. The proper pens and pastures were provided.

But lying in bed and waiting for Florrie to appear, Ruth knew that she wanted to see Hazzard again. Those few minutes had revived the essential something in her. She was curious. She supposed that now he lived in a house of his own, and that—possibly—he was married, though she could not connect the Hazzard of No. 7 Roper's Row with a wife.

She found herself vaguely jealous of the hypothetical woman. But how absurd!

The little room felt very stuffy, but it was even stuffier in the morning. Florrie objected to a widely open window, and complained of draughts on her head. She appeared to love snuggling down in a good warm fug.

Ruth slipped out of bed in the darkness, opened the window another six inches, and scuffled back to bed, hearing the sounds of footsteps in the passage. A church clock somewhere had struck ten.

Florrie bounced in with her usual air of breathlessness, switched on the light, and flopped down on her bed. She looked flushed and excited.

"Oh, lordie, I'm getting out of this."

Ruth sat up in bed. Obviously something dramatic had happened in the feminine world.

"You're going to leave?"

"Rather."

"Another place?"

Florrie's big mouth showed her white teeth.

"What do you think! No more of this—thanks—I'm going to be married."

Ruth's eyes dilated.

"To one—of your——?"

"Good lord, no. He's got a little business of his own, and a villa up at Highbury. And I'm to have a servant. He's forty-three——"

"And you are twenty-six."

"What's that matter? I'm going to be comfy. P'raps I'll come

down and do some of my shopping here, and show you girls a thing or two. And I'd like to show the old Gom woman. Oh, my dear, I'm fed up with this bloody show."

Obviously Florrie was greatly excited; also, she had decided to escape. It was the one bolt hole from such an establishment as Petter & Gom's. Ruth had peeped fearfully down this bolt hole and had recoiled from it.

She lay down and wondered whether Florrie would notice the widely open window, but Florrie did not notice it. She was too full of her man and her maid-servant and her villa.

II

A fortnight went by, and Ruth, finding that she could not obtain her medicine without a doctor's signature, told a white lie and was presented with a Thursday afternoon. Petter & Gom's closed at one o'clock on Saturdays, but Saturday afternoon was of no use to Ruth, for Dr. Salisbury's days were Monday and Thursday. She was excited. She expected to find Dr. Hazzard in charge. She had bought a little piece of cherry-coloured velvet to give colour to her black hat.

She waited for two hours in the crowded corridor, sitting on a yellow bench with her back to a white-tiled wall. The place smelt of warm humanity, musty unwashed clothes, and drugs. The hospital cat, a huge creature with blue ribbon round its neck, paraded up and down, and ignored proffered strokings. Women gossiped in undertones. Every now and again a dozen patients would be counted off by the nurse in charge, and marched into the out-patient room.

Ruth's batch was admitted at half-past four. She entered between a Russian woman from Soho, and an old Italian who had a goitre like a bladder of lard attached to her throat. Ruth was flushed. She saw the half-circle of students, and the physician in the arm-chair, a gaunt man with spectacles and a moustache that stuck out like a nail-brush. She was intensely disappointed. She had expected to see Hazzard, and life presented her with Dr. Salisbury.

She sat down on the bench and looked at her knees, feeling like a child who had dressed for a day's excursion, only to find that the trip had been cancelled. She took her turn dolefully in the patient's chair, answered Dr. Salisbury's questions, and confessed that she was feeling no better.

"Go on with the medicine."

He had a rasping, hurried voice. He asked her whether she was constipated. She flushed, and denied the accusation.

"Very well. Go on with the medicine. Next case."

She walked out of the room on the edge of tears. But how childish of her! She might have known that things never happened as you expected them to happen.

III

Mrs. Tribute, who swept and garnished the Melfont cottage, associated herself in Hazzard's mind with those stately sayings, "Lay up your treasure in heaven, where moth and rust doth not corrupt." For she was a goodness that was without garrulity, and it was she, who, while gathering the windfallen apples under Hazzard's trees, put that particular thought into his head. He had a chair and a book, and dappled shade, and a glimpse of the river.

Said Sarah Tribute, "Some of they London children don't know grass, I guess,—not grass as it should be."

Which was true, and Hazzard, who was reading the translation of a German monograph on the results of a new tuberculin, emerged to add that there were thousands of children who had never seen an apple growing.

Mrs. Tribute said that this was wrong, very wrong, though she did suppose that people who chose to live like emmets could not be expected to be anything but emmets.

Hazzard agreed, but went on to say that an emmet was happy only among emmets, just as most curates were happy only in the presence of curates or women. The creature accustomed to crowds becomes terrified or miserable when separated from the crowd.

Not that Hazzard was sentimental about sick children. They roused his compassion; they were part of his job; they were disharmonies to be set right and made rhythmical. Nor did he believe that civilization's disharmonies were wholly the fault of big business and the bad landlord; they were just as much the fault of the bad parent, the indiscriminate parent, the rabbit community. It was part of the foolishness of breeding rabbits instead of racehorses. Obviously. Though eugenics were in their infancy, and birth control a subject that roused stuttering thunders.

But climbing Sisbury after tea on that golden September day, with incipient flickerings of yellow in the foliage of the elms and the beeches, he looked down upon the valley and had his vision. Man becomes super-man when he dreams. It may be an out-throw of his mind's playfulness. Down there in the valley weed fires were

burning, and smoke made a silver haze, and the pungency of it drifted to the hill tops. So were weeds consumed, while the human weeds scattered their progeny. But Hazzard's vision was not distinctive. He saw his mother's cottage the centre of a colony, a playing place for convalescent children, little creatures who had no chance, and someone—some woman rather like his mother in charge of it. The shadowy figure of the eternal mother seemed to shape itself out of the haze of the silver smoke.

Insensibly his vision grew more personal. He found himself thinking of the girl in the glass case. He had not seen her again. He wondered whether Salisbury had seen her, and whether the iron mixture had done her any good. Stuff in a bottle. Whereas what she needed—— And he was conscious of a little spasm of compassion. She was so like a child, a grown-up child, with her tremulous face and her virginal pallor.

Her face haunted him that evening. It came between him and the pages of his book, and floated in the soft dusk of the September day. Sitting in his chair under the apple-tree he heard the river running, and then a star came out in the deep blue black vault, a very solitary star. He watched it for a while. Sidereal moth imaginings seemed to play about it. Was man—the searcher—doomed to be as solitary as that star?

IV

Hazzard's invasion of Messrs. Petter & Gom's was not wholly fortuitous. It was a question of association. He happened to be walking along Oxford Street, and he saw the firm's name repeated several times above the shop fronts across the way. He passed over, remembering that the particular glass case was in the silk and fancy department. The impulse to enter had to be rationalized. He could remind himself of the fact that he was in her debt; she had been kind to him seven years ago.

But what was his need? What could Messrs. Petter & Gom's supply him with by way of fancy? He would have to exercise fancy. But once inside the shop he paused, as though bewildered by the multitude of "fancies" and of women.

A shop-walker accosted him.

"Can I assist you, sir?"

"I want to buy a present."

"What sort of article, sir? Something for a lady?"

"The fact is—I don't know. Yes, it is for a lady."

"Perhaps you would like to look round, sir."

Hazzard proceeded to look round, having conceived the inspiration of buying something—God knows what—for Mrs. Tribute. It was his first experience of such a shop, he—the most unfeminine of men. Also he was searching for the glass case and the grown child inside it, and found that he had his back to it, and that the cash desk was located near the door.

The buying of his present was a rather haphazard affair. Again it was a matter of suggestion. A blonde young woman suggested that six fancy handkerchiefs would be "naice" for an elderly lady. Hazzard bought the handkerchiefs, only to discover that his cash and the bill went by overhead wire to the cash desk, and that he was not supposed to visit it personally. He rebelled. He was not going to be choused by a piece of mechanism.

On his way out he diverged towards the glass case. Ruth's head was down. She was not aware of him until he spoke.

"Good morning, Miss Avery. I happened to be in here——"

Her eyes expressed terror, delight and terror. The regulations forbade her speaking to customers. But Hazzard——! She stared; her face was tremulous.

"I hope—you are better?"

Her confusion puzzled him.

"Not very much—I'm afraid."

"I suppose you saw Dr. Salisbury?"

"Yes."

"I should like to have done more. Are you still attending?"

"Oh, yes."

The shop-walker intervened.

"Nothing wrong with your change, I hope, sir?"

Hazzard smiled at him.

"No, nothing—I used to be Miss Avery's doctor. Happened to notice her—here. Curious coincidence. Good morning."

"Good morning, sir."

He raised his hat to Ruth, and his impression of her was that of a child whose eyes pleaded, "Oh, get me out of this place. Take me out of this cage."

Chapter Nineteen

I

HAZZARD, extracting his latch-key from the door of No. 7, and closing the door after him, was met by the voice of Mr. Robert Crapp.

"Is that you, doctor?"

"It is."

"Here's a nice to-do."

Mr. Crapp's voice was full of resentment. He had been standing in a cold fume on the first floor landing when he had heard the sound of Hazzard's latch-key. Hazzard saw him at the top of the first flight of stairs outlined against the landing window, a figure of gaunt indignation. Mr. Crapp's tea had not arrived, and after much ringing of the bell, and calling down the stairs, he had descended to investigate.

"Drunk, sir, most disgracefully drunk, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"The woman. Drunk—on the kitchen floor. Disgusting and helpless. I tell you, sir, I threw a jug of water over her. No result. Dead drunk, sir."

His movements, the shrugging of his shoulders, had a wooden emphasis. He came down the stairs on his long, stiltlike legs. He was very much put out, and, like Somerset House, making the most of it, and his indignation gathered Hazzard into its indictments. Had not Hazzard been responsible for engaging such a woman?

"I have an important social engagement at eight, sir. Most exasperating—most unnecessary."

His Adam's apple seemed to quiver. He shot his cuffs, and tugged at his collar.

"You will have to sack the woman, sir; I shall insist on it."

Hazzard left him and went along the passage to the kitchen. There were times when Somerset House made itself appear very superfluous, but for the moment Hazzard was more concerned about this domestic debacle. He was surprised. He had found Mrs. Duggan a very decent and reliable body, and he was not inclined to lose her services because of one indiscretion and Mr. Crapp's official indignation. He entered the kitchen, but before he entered it he had heard the sound of deep, stertorous breathing.

Mrs. Duggan was lying on the floor between the table and the window. Her face was moist and congested; the lips puffed in and out as she breathed. Hazzard bent over her, felt her pulse and, parting the lids, examined the pupils of her eyes. Nor was there any smell of alcohol. The thing was obvious, and he straightened and looked down at her both as the doctor and the householder who was discovering his male helplessness when the human mainspring of a house's routine ceased to function.

Mr. Robert Crapp had followed him to the kitchen doorway.

"Case for the police—I should say."

Hazzard turned on him.

"The woman's not drunk. She's had a stroke. You had better go out and get your tea somewhere."

Mr. Crapp resented Hazzard's manner. It might be described as contemptuous.

"I can look after my own tea, sir. It's not the first time I have seen an intoxicated female——"

Hazzard's glance brushed him aside. It said, "Oh, go to the devil," for Crapp could be a rather ridiculous person, and the doctor in Hazzard had taken charge. Absurd world. A man's tea failed to arrive, and forgetting those numberless occasions when it had appeared with the regularity of an income-tax demand note, he flew into a monkeyish temper. Meanwhile—something had to be done for the woman. He went to the telephone in the converted shop, and rang up "Bennet's" and the casualty officer. Yes, there was a bed vacant.

"We can take her—at once," said the voice.

"I shall have to bring her along in a cab. I'll ring up the police."

He left Crapp fussing up and down the stairs like an old grey tom cat unable to make up its mind upon the adventure of going out, and went forth and found a four-wheeler and brought it to the end of the Row. A police constable in plain clothes had arrived, and with the help of the constable and the cabbie Mrs. Duggan was carried to the cab, a scattering of children and grown-ups watching the process and commenting on it. Roper's Row agreed that it was a case of drunk and incapable. Roper's Row worked on the plan of probabilities. The police constable, who was something of a peripatetic philosopher, remarked upon the attitude of the crowd as he dealt capably and gently with Mrs. Duggan's head and shoulders.

"Living near a fish shop makes 'em smell stale fish—everywhere."

He looked at Hazzard with the shrewd blue kindness of his English eyes.

"Can't expect too much, sir. Can I be of any further use?"

Hazzard thanked him.

"No, I am going with her myself. I'm a doctor."

"Very good, sir. I'll be getting along."

As the cab trundled through Bloomsbury Hazzard saw in the poor old stertorous figure huddled on the opposite seat one of those tragedies in which life is tied up in a sack and left unwanted on the world's doorstep. The woman, even if she survived the cerebral hæmorrhage, would be of no further use as a worker. She would be an infirmary case. She was one of those solitary women who had no relatives, or no relatives who mattered. All that he could do would be to leave her like a sack of misfortune at the door of the "casualty" department. Life was full of such makeshifts, not because—as the Socialists would have us believe—man does not interfere sufficiently with other men's activities, but because man has tried to interfere sentimentally with certain inexorable processes. The Socialists would propose to prescribe more super-sentimentalism in a bottle. For as Hazzard saw it, the Social Emotionalists did not implore man to live more bravely, more justly, to temper the inevitable struggle with compassion, and to show himself humble under the eyes of the wise, but to lie with his fellows like a sardine in a tin—all nicely oiled.

It happened that Sir Dighton's car followed Hazzard's cab through the gate into the forecourt of "Bennet's." The car picked up old Dighton at the main doorway while Hazzard was helping the casualty porter at the side entrance. Cases of cerebral hæmorrhage have to be handled with care, and Sir Dighton, looking out of a window, saw Hazzard helping to lift that obscure human bundle. Extraordinary fellow—no *nous!* How could you elect to a hospital staff a man who had so little sense of his own dignity?

Having paid the cabbie and done what he could, Hazzard walked back to Roper's Row and his own particular domestic problem. It was complicated by the existence of Mr. Crapp, though Mr. Crapp as a follower of Karl Marx should have been ready to take off his official coat and help to wash dishes. But on letting himself into No. 7, Hazzard found an envelope fastened by a pin to the wall of the passage, with his name inscribed on it in red ink, "Dr. Hazzard—Urgent and Personal."

Hazzard unpinned it. Mr. Crapp had been expeditious. The envelope contained a postal order for ten shillings and a formal letter.

"Sir,—

"This is to inform you that under the circumstances I have been compelled to make other arrangements. I enclose a postal order for 10*s*. (ten shillings), being the amount I owe for my rooms. Kindly acknowledge the same—to 17 Bleak Street, W.C. A representative will call and collect such belongings of mine as I have been unable to move in this emergency.

"Yours faithfully,
"Robert Washington Crapp."

Hazzard pocketed the postal order and the letter. A gentleman who retires upon his dignity may be behaving with unintentional consideration, so exit Crapp and his problem. Hazzard ascended the stairs conscious of being most pleasantly alone, and that No. 7 Roper's Row was supremely his to be alone in. Exquisite solitude. He found himself wondering why he had tolerated Crapp, why the Crapps of the social machine were tolerated at all. Probably, because other men were too usefully busy to bother.

Meanwhile—yes—meanwhile, he would have to revert temporarily to his student's days and play at being cook and housemaid.

II

Ruth, emerging from the side door used by the staff of Messrs. Petter & Gom's, found Pont Street covered by a canopy of shot silk. The sunset had a suddenness after the darkness of stairs and passage, and she stood for a moment on the pavement with her face upturned towards all that blueness with its fleckings and streaks of gold and crimson. Other girls, grouped for a moment near the door, chattered and laughed before separating singly or in couples. One or two men were loitering.

A voice addressed itself to Ruth.

"Good evening, Miss Avery. Nice evening for a walk."

Her startled glance descended like a beam of light, and settled for a moment on the man's face. He was fortyish and rather fat, with a moustache that made her think of the yolk of an egg, and a nose that spread itself. His face had an injected redness. His eyes, sly and conspiratorial and complacent, both challenged and caressed her with a crude familiarity that was brutal.

She drew in her petals.

"Good evening, Mr. Sark."

"Feel like a stroll?"

For the moment her fear of him made her mute. He was the

shop-walker in her department, and other girls had warned her against him, for he was the worst sort of cad, a bully, a fellow who persecuted you if you did not smile upon him.

She said, "Oh, I have an appointment. I'm afraid I'm rather late."

His little eyes narrowed, and without looking at him again she hurried off with her white lie, hoping that he would not follow her. At the corner where Pont Street joined Oxford Street she turned to look back, and saw his square figure coming along the pavement. He was one of those men with fat, round thighs who turn their knees and toes out when they walk. She fled down Oxford Street, walking very fast, and trying to assure herself that she was leaving him behind. Why could he not let her alone to enjoy this soft September evening and the sunset? This was the sort of man who was incapable of appreciating the fact that a girl could be self-sufficient, or at least as far as he was concerned, and that a woman might have an inward life of her own. Yet being a woman, life and its incidents were to her supremely personal. She was attracted or repelled. She could not yet say that the man who is interested in something else besides sex is the only kind of man worth caring for.

She did not look back until she reached the end of Tottenham Court Road. Yes, he was still following her; she saw his square figure some twenty yards away, and pretended not to see it. She supposed that he was amusing himself at her expense. She dashed across in front of a bus, and went on, and reaching another street, turned down it, and turned again into Great Russell Street. She might be able to give Mr. Sark the slip. Crossing the road, and hurrying along by the Museum railings, she threw a backward glance over her right shoulder, only to see him on the opposite pavement, a few yards behind her.

As a matter of fact Ruth had not been walking aimlessly. Some time during the day a little breeze of adventure had ruffled her spirit, and she had put on her hat with the intention of wandering round Bloomsbury, because Roper's Row was in Bloomsbury. Hunted, she headed towards Red Lion Square. She had not crossed the square or threaded Roper's Row since the day when she had fled to Sally Sherman, but Sally was married, and had three children, and had become too busy for devoted friendships. Ruth and Sally had drifted apart. But in her hurry to escape the assiduous creature on the opposite pavement Ruth forgot time and space, and thought of No. 7 as a place where Mrs. Bunce still sold papers and stationery, and ink and Christmas cards. Mrs. Bunce's

shop suggested itself as a refuge. She could walk in and meet Mrs. Bunce's bothered spectacles and say, "I'm Ruth Avery. Don't you remember me? and how is Ophelia?"

She made for Red Lion Square and saw the last of the sunlight on the tops of the trees. Pan still followed oilily on his fat thighs. Ruth took a last backward glance as she reached the Row. It was a cleft of shadow under the brilliant sky, with the trees of Gray's Inn glimmering gold at the end of its narrow vista.

But the front of No. 7 dashed her expectations. The two windows of the shop were screened with canvas blinds, and the fascia board above them bore no name. Obviously the shop had ceased to be a shop, and she faltered in front of it, conscious of the impending presence of the male. It occurred to her that she might ring the bell at the side door, and keep her back to the world and Mr. Sark, and if someone answered the bell she could inquire for the Bunces.

She was in the act of diverging towards the side door when she found herself confronting Hazzard, the man of her thoughts, and yet the most unexpected of figures. Attached to him were a number of paper bags, brown bags and white bags. He was wearing no hat. His face seemed to catch the light.

She felt both alarmed and rescued. Her frightened impulse, escaping three breaths ahead of her self-consciousness, rushed knee deep into the situation.

"Oh—Dr. Hazzard—I didn't know.—I was wondering whether the Bunces——"

He looked at her with peculiar intentness. He appeared neither annoyed, nor surprised, nor pleased. The suddenness of her seemed to make him stand and stare. Also, he was puzzled by her air of breathlessness, her colour, that something of the frightened child in her eyes. He said—as the doctor in him might have said it —"What's the matter?"

Her face quivered like the face of a flower struck by a blundering bee. It was the question one put to a child, and she answered it like a child, with unashamed and unselfconscious frankness.

"A man's following me.—I'm so glad—I happened——"

There was an instant's pause. She was aware of his steady eyes looking beyond her. Someone passed. She saw Hazzard's eyes grow hard and bright.

"Yes, I think I recognize the person. The gentleman who asked me if I was dissatisfied with my change?"

She said, "You remember? How—quick!" and grew suddenly silent, and confused, and disconcertingly feminine, yet still—somehow—the child.

She was aware of him moving towards the door.

"Perhaps you would like to come and sit down for five minutes."

She looked at him again with her eyes wide open. She was holding her breath and did not know it. He appeared to be smiling, and yet she could not say that the lines of his face changed.

"Oh, thank you. Might I?"

"Of course. My hands are rather full. I've been shopping."

She would never be emancipated. She betrayed her essential shadowself in her sudden glide towards the door, and in her opening of it, and in her little timid side-glance at his face.

"You see, I didn't know."

She would have let him enter first, but he stood back, still regarding her with an air of gently dissecting her emotions and her motives. He nodded her in, and stood for a moment looking up and down the Row very much at his leisure, and was able to observe a loitering figure disappearing with a sort of sinister oiliness round a corner. Then he followed her in, and closed the door with his lame foot.

"I still live here—you see."

It appeared to him that she was trying to efface herself against the passage wall. She seemed no more than a little girlish figure attached to it, all eyes and pale face. And suddenly he was conscious of feeling strangely compassionate towards her.

"That's all right. The fellow's gone. Go and sit down in there."

With another nod he indicated the open door of the class room that had once been Mrs. Bunce's shop, and she went in and stood looking about her rather like a child in a chamber of horrors, for there were diagrams upon the walls, red and blue patterns, and pictures of strange human interiors. And in one corner a skeleton, hollow eyes and with fallen jaw, hung from a bracket.

Hazzard corrected himself. He remembered that all those interesting anatomical exhibits were cleared away before he gave a children's party.

"I'm sorry. Rather depressing in there. That's my private lecture room. Try the kitchen—straight down the passage."

III

She preceded him down the passage into the kitchen, and with an air of recovering her breath and her dignity, sat down on one of the two Windsor chairs, with her back to the window. Hazzard, getting rid of his various paper bags, took a box of matches from

the mantelpiece, and lit the gas-ring. He was wondering how much she was the child of coincidence.

He said, "You'll excuse my getting tea?"

She smiled up at him nervously.

"Please don't let me be in the way. You see, I came out for a walk, and when I found he was following me—I had to try and think of somewhere."

"Exactly. Has it happened before?"

"Yes—but not—quite—like this."

"So—you thought of old No. 7, and the Bunces?"

"Yes."

He had taken some plates and dishes from a cupboard, and was opening the various paper bags.

"Mrs. Bunce is dead. Ophelia got married. I have the whole house now. One man—one house."

He talked to her as he might have talked to a child, not with the air of benignant jocularity assumed by some men, but with a kind of grave frankness. Also he was looking at her with the eyes of a doctor, and noticing—now that the flush had faded—that her skin had the same creamy pallor, and that there were dark smudges under her eyes.

"Hallo, I have forgotten the kettle."

He remedied the omission, and she watched him with intent, still eyes. She had the air of not wishing to move. He was taking tomatoes out of a bag, and placing them on a plate.

"Why do you do—this?"

"Why?"

He appeared gently amused.

"I'm a sort of Robinson Crusoe just at present. I've lost my housekeeper and cook and maid of all work. I tried a woman from Tudor Alley, but she was too—septic."

Her eyes took on that poignant look.

"You have no one here?"

"There are a dozen guinea-pigs in the yard! Don't you remember how I used to do my own housekeeping?"

She made a sudden, eager movement.

"Oh, do let me do something.—I love doing things, and I never get a chance. Haven't you had tea yet?"

"No."

He regarded her attentively, a little whimsically.

"I proposed to have two boiled eggs, and some bread and butter, and a little salad. By the way—have you had your tea?"

"Yes."

She was on her feet. Her face had grown animated, pleading.

"Oh, do let me make you a salad. I used to be good at salads. But—of course——"

She flinched, as though afraid of having appeared too impetuous. He was opening another bag; it contained two small lettuces.

"Will you? That's splendid. But—you will have to share the salad. Do they give you salads at Petter & Gom's?"

"No. But may I—really?"

"Of course. You'll find the cutlery and china in that cupboard. By the way, what vegetables do they give you at Petter & Gom's?"

She was at the cupboard, and she answered over her shoulder.

"Oh, boiled potatoes, and greens, and parsnips, but they are always so flat and watery."

"I suppose so. And jam?"

"Yes, jam."

"What is called household jam?"

"Yes."

"And margarine?"

"Yes, margarine."

She had come to the table, and was looking at him slantwise from under her hat. What queer questions he asked, and how interested he appeared to be in quite irrelevant details. She seemed to hesitate between a smile and the extreme of seriousness.

He said, "Why not take off your hat? I'll be responsible for the eggs and tea, if you will deal with the salad and the bread and butter."

Very gravely, and with an air of conscious deliberation, she put up her hands and removed her hat.

IV

It was she who laid the table for tea.

"Don't you have a sitting-room?"

He told her that he used the kitchen because it was more practical and saved time, and that he was a very busy man, and that he had every minute of his day mapped out. And she looked at him with a wonder that was quite spontaneous, for she supposed that a doctor who was a man of some authority at a hospital such as "Bennet's" could not be hard up. But her wonder was not concerned merely with material things.

They sat down on opposite sides of the kitchen table, and he had suggested that she should pour out the tea. She did so, but like a

child she was chiefly anxious about the salad, because she had made it and felt towards it as a kind of thank-offering.

"Do you take sugar?"

"One lump. And how long have you been at Petter & Gom's?"

"Two years."

"Like it?"

The glance she gave him was almost a reproach.

"I have to like it. Some of us haven't any choice, have we?"

"Only those who insist on having a choice."

He observed her gently. She was both shy of him and yet not shy. She behaved just as one of his children might have behaved. So much of a celibate was he that the sensuous part of her was not apparent to him, and he was able to regard her as a pretty, sexless creature who somehow made him feel protective and compassionate. They might be together in space, but in time he was of another generation.

"I do hope the salad's nice."

"Very. I'm always in too much of a hurry for the making of salads. At eight o'clock I have about twenty young pups to feed."

"Puppies?"

She took him literally, and he smiled.

"Young men who have to be coached."

She nodded, and her eyes appeared big with some unasked question. Obviously he was enjoying the salad, and presently she came out with her question.

"But—who—does things here for you?"

"Nobody—just at present. I'm camping."

"But you oughtn't to. It's quite wrong. A man who has to work as hard as you do."

He looked at her with the air of kind tolerance one extends to the young. Self-pity had not formed part of his curriculum.

"I like hard work. Possibly one does get a little tired of boiled eggs and corned beef."

He did not suppose she would understand the inwardness of his struggle or the ruthlessness of man to man; he did not think of her as understanding it. She was a coincidence, a creature who—somehow—appealed to his compassion as one of his sick and sensitive children did. And in a way he talked to her as he might have talked to a young daughter, had he had one, with one eye looking down his microscope. But certainly, being your own cook and charwoman was something of a nuisance, and a lone man was expected to be so helpless, though he was less so when alone than as the victim of female frowsiness. Hazzard could not tolerate frowsi-

ness. A house might be like a laboratory, bare and austere, but it should be meticulously and efficiently clean.

He said, "I can't stand dirty people. That's the problem—you see. Any odd woman. I could do quite well with a Chinaman."

Her silence had the quality of a shocked interrogation. A Chinaman! But—then—of course all very clever men were curious. And she stole a look at him, and wondered a little at his quiet forehead and the set of his eyes. Always he appeared to be looking at something that was not manifest to ordinary eyes.

The mystery of him delighted her.

And then she saw him pull out a five-shilling watch, whereas she had supposed that all eminent physicians possessed gold watches. But gold watches did not synchronize with No. 7 Roper's Row. She got up quickly and reached for her hat.

"I—really—must be going now, Dr. Hazzard. But couldn't I wash up?"

He appeared to consider her offer. It had followed on her suggestibility, her quickness in taking a hint.

"No need. Do it last thing. I've half an hour. I'll see you back to Petter & Gom's."

She was putting on her hat.

"Oh, but you mustn't; wasting your time."

"I always try to get half an hour's walk before my pups arrive."

He did not know that she felt touched, and that the wings of her feminine spirit were fluttered. He had no particular interest in such phenomena. He went out with her as though he were taking a child home after a party, because he knew that offensive, fat fellow might still be loitering. Mentally, his attitude was that of holding a child's hand, a gentle and likeable child. The talk between them had become somewhat formal, but the fault was not his. She had conceived a new consciousness.

At the side door in Pont Street they found themselves alone on the dark pavement. She was all eyes in a dim face, and suddenly he was aware of her as a lonely and rather helpless thing, like a flower floating on obscure, deep waters.

He became abrupt.

"Still—attending at 'Bennet's'?"

She took a moment to reply.

"I—I find it difficult to get off. You see——"

He did see; he saw far further than she imagined. He had seen so much of submerged humanity.

"That won't do. I look after a few patients at No. 7—sometimes—between seven and eight. I shan't charge you anything."

She made a little breathless sound—rather like a sigh.

"But—I couldn't take up your time."

"Nonsense."

He raised his hat.

"Bring a friend with you—if you like. My job—is trying to help people—you know. Good night."

She went in, thinking him very wonderful. Her conception began to swell like the seed-vessel of a flower.

Chapter Twenty

I

At this period of his life Hazzard kept a day-book or journal, and on the pages of this book he allowed himself a fanciful frankness. Certain of these jottings might be set down to repressed loquacity, for his life was so full of silences and reserves, that not being able to confess to a friend, he confessed to himself on paper. On the purely personal pages he would dash down some brusque and ironic observation upon life as it affected him or as he saw it. Also, he used this book for scientific jottings, and the data he might happen to be collecting, and for notes and suggestions upon the work he had in hand. The latter pages were relegated to finance, though his receipts were simplicity itself, and his expenditure hardly less unsophisticated.

His personal jottings had a pungency. He could grin at himself as well as at his fellows. And sometimes he would glance through some of these intimate blurtings and smile over them. Also he would comment on them. "Hallo, you were feeling rather bad when you wrote that. Bitter and bad. Too much hydrochloric acid in your thinking-sack."

There were occasional fantastic headlines.

"Patients or Pups?—?—?"

Some such scrawl symbolized the facing of a problem, and the choice remained. He had come by a considerable reputation as a coach; he lived on his coaching, and sometimes he would ask himself the question, "Shall I chuck pure medicine, live on pup breeding, and give up everything of me that matters to research?" It was a possibility. Prejudice could not prevent him from cultivating bacteria and from looking down a microscope, though it might try and refuse the recognition of his discoveries—if he made them. Prejudice was written down in his day-book with a monster P, and so was Pride.

He could read this, "Damn them, they shan't suppress me. I'm too tough to be suppressed."

Also, there were domestic scrawls.

"This business of existing, of eating and washing and going to bed and dressing! One's body remains so babyish. As if there always had to be a woman somewhere in the background."

"I would like to invent a piece of mechanism that could do everything about a house."

One of his most recent confessions was very naïve.

"Bored with boiled eggs. Also beds. Have to find a woman of some sort."

But at the moment he was responsible for himself and for no one else, which makes for the simplification of life, and his attitude towards the immediate future was outlined in a letter recently written to Moorhouse.

"The tax-gatherer has left me, which should be prophetic. But I'm rather at the cross-roads. As you know, there will be a vacancy on the hospital staff next year. Everybody knows it, and old Dighton and Tom Tate very much so. I shall make a fight for it. According to every decent consideration the post should be mine, but old Dighton and Tate and their clique will do all they can to keep me off the staff. Yes, I know.

"I am inclined to regard my success or failure in this as a test.

"If they succeed in keeping me off the staff at 'Bennet's,' I shall decide to throw up medicine as medicine. I can earn my living as a coach, and concentrate on pure research."

Moorhouse, in replying to this letter, had inserted a friendly protest.

"It will be a gross scandal if they don't elect you to the staff. And yet I can't quite see you becoming nothing but a chaser of bugs. There's too much humanity in you, old man. You will hear cries for help, yes—even on the top floor of Roper's Row, and you'll rush out to help. Not that research isn't the great thing, but there are other great things."

Moorhouse may have been wiser than he knew, or he knew his Christopher Hazzard better than Hazzard knew himself, or perhaps there is an inevitableness about a certain man's progress that cannot be obscured by either pride or pique. There was the Hazzard of Sisbury Hill, and the Hazzard of the Marylebone Hospital for Sick Children, recluse or reclaimer, thinker and man of action. His doubleness was significant, as significant as Christ's sojourn in the Wilderness and His healing of the sick. Hazzard might write some bitter things in his journal, but his healing craft was without bitterness, and that was what mattered.

For, between seven and eight o'clock on three evenings of the week he was at the service of a dozen or so poor people who came to him at Roper's Row, particular cases. The work was gratuitous, because these particular patients had to be desperately poor, old

women and old men, typists, clerks, flower-sellers and what not. For so much of a doctor's work can be labour of love.

As Hazzard wrote in his journal:

"I wonder if the dear public knows that I have worked for some twelve years as a student and as a qualified man, and that I have taken in private fees—perhaps—some twenty guineas. I'm supposed to be an expert—largely for nothing—as nothing is understood by the commercialists.

"No doubt the public thinks that the gentleman who acts as Medical Registrar at 'Bennet's' receives a good salary. I receive not a penny.

"Nor am I paid a penny for my work at the Children's Hospital.

"Honorary appointments. Honourable—— Who grudges that—when he loves the job. But a man has to live. Your expert must eat and wear clothes. Were he a Solomon he could not go naked. The police would see to that.

"So, I can understand how some men's hearts have been broken, and their courage crushed.

"But—I—perhaps—am fortunate in having no love to waste."

Also, he had no capital to hazard. He possessed nothing but some furniture, the fittings and accessories of his little lab. and of his lecture-room, and the cottage at Melfont. He was in the fight, stripped and unencumbered; at least—it seemed so; but one thing he did not possess, a comrade to care and to contrive for him behind his back.

II

Some situations seem to arise of themselves.

One evening Ruth Avery arrived, and sat with the other particular people on the bench in the passage.

When he called her in to the converted shop, which was also his out-patient department, she looked at him with shy but waiting eyes. For behind her eyes stood woman.

"I have taken you at your word."

Being a busy man he preferred people to be frank and practical.

"Quite right. Are you feeling any better?"

"I'm afraid not. I'm sorry."

"Don't apologize for that. It's neither your fault nor mine. We inherited this money muddle. The fact is——"

He paused, and she watched his face.

"One has to say things that seem brutal. You are anæmic—because—you are living an anæmic life. No fresh air, no exercise, the wrong sort of food."

She looked poignant.

"I know. But how can I help it? I have to live. I've had to fend for myself since I was seventeen."

He nodded.

"Exactly. There are so many lives that are wrong for a woman. Some women——"

She broke in.

"It's doing such unnatural things—somehow, just taking money and sending it back, and putting down figures."

His eyes were intent.

"Yes—function—physical and mental self-expression. Oxygen's essential, and yet life isn't all oxygen. You couldn't get any other sort of work?"

She looked at him helplessly, and he accepted her helplessness.

"I see. Well, try and get a walk each evening. I'm giving you iron. And as to food——"

"I have to eat what is provided."

"Nothing special allowed—if your doctor——?"

"You see—we are supposed to go to the staff doctor, but often we are afraid to go."

"For fear of losing your job?"

She nodded.

He scribbled something on a piece of paper.

"Could you afford to buy yourself milk, butter, a little fruit?"

"I might."

"Try."

III

A week later, it was on a Saturday, she came to him again. There were other people waiting, and Ruth took her place at the far end of the bench, for she wished to be the last to see him. She looked ill and in pain, and she sat there with lowered eyes, and with an air of self-isolation.

She was the last to go in. She found Hazzard standing by one of the windows examining with a pocket lens some object in his palm, and seeing him absorbed for the moment she sat down like a submissive child, and was silent. She gazed at a knot in one of the floor boards, and thought how strange it was that she should be here.

Something made her look up. She found him observing her. She had a feeling that he had been looking at her for quite a long while.

He said, "You're not so well."

His voice had a gentleness, and her head drooped.

"No, not so well."

"Sure?"

"Yes."

He came nearer, slipping the lens into his waistcoat pocket.

"Quite sure?"

She raised her eyes suddenly, and their expression was one of blind helplessness.

"I have had to take your advice, Dr. Hazzard."

"You mean——?"

"I've been discharged."

He remained very still, looking down at her.

"Tell me. On account of ill health?"

"No. I made a mistake over some change. I wasn't feeling well; it was one of those stupid days. The customer was nasty about it. At closing time I was sent for. I had to go to the head of our department. He was in a hurry. I was told that I had been reported on adversely on previous occasions."

"By whom?"

"Oh, it must have been by the man—you saw——"

"Nice fellow. And then——?"

"I was asked if I had anything to say."

"And had you?"

She made a little, shrugging, helpless movement.

"Somehow—I hadn't. I just felt broken and stupid. And that's all."

Her submissiveness was the quality that struck him most. It was not that she was cowed. Injustice or harshness affected her just as it affected a sensitive child; she would be mute, and a little bewildered. And he was conscious of anger, even as cruelty to one of his sick children would have made him angry.

"I see. And what are you doing?"

The interlocked fingers of her two hands moved restlessly.

"Oh, I have managed to get a room for a night or two."

"Where?"

"In Harper Street."

Harper Street! Did she know? But of course she did not know. The lines of his face deepened to a kind of gentle harshness. He stood holding the lapels of his coat. He looked at her twisting fingers.

He said, "I don't like Harper Street."

Her eyes rose to his like a child's.

"Why? I saw a card in a window. I had to go somewhere."

"Look here, you are not going to stay in that street. It's per-

fectly simple. There's your old room here on the top floor. You can have it. I dare say you can manage for a few nights, and it will give you time to look round."

Had he felt any qualms over making her the offer they would have been dispelled by the effect his offer had on her. She said nothing; she gave him one look of wonder and relief, and then began to weep, silently, and as though her tears had a rightness. These tears should have made Hazzard uncomfortable, but they did not. He saw them as the tears of a child.

"That's all right."

"Is there anyone as good as you are?"

She was very deeply moved. No doubt we all try to contrive the working of our own ends, but she had not contrived to get herself into Hazzard's house. It just happened. It was the human and simple solution of her problem,—at least for the time being, the kind of solution that a man like Hazzard would arrive at. He had no qualms. He was not aware of her as sex. He was applying the obvious splint to the fracture of her fortunes. Also, celibate that he was, he had a flair for women, he knew nothing about them, and yet he was wise as to the essential values of a woman. He was not being humbugged by a little, ingenious wench. Certainly, she belonged to a generation that, however indecent it might be, covered its ankles and its indecencies. He saw her just as she was, a pretty, frightened and rather helpless creature, in pain both in body and mind, and innocently on the edge of Harper Street, or Harlot Street, as he might have called it. His succouring of her was a physician's act. And just because her sex, and sex in general, was of so little importance to him, he did not trouble to realize its possibilities.

He said, "Have you left anything at Harper Street?"

"Yes, my trunk. It's only a little trunk."

"What number?"

"Seventeen."

"I'll go round and get it."

She protested faintly.

"But—why should you? Besides——"

"Had you made any arrangement with the landlady?"

"I said I wanted a room for a night or two."

He made a movement towards the door.

"I'll go round at once. Saturday evening is a free evening so far as I am concerned. You'll find some matches in the kitchen, and if you look in the cupboard on the landing you'll find some sheets and blankets. Supposing you go and get settled."

She rose slowly to her feet and followed him out into the passage. Her submission had already become devotion.

"No one has ever been so kind——"

"That's all right. You go up and see to your room."

Roper's Row was in autumnal darkness, but to Hazzard the darkness suggested no useful and surreptitious cloak for an action that more than half the world would have regarded as disingenuous. He walked to Harper Street and found it vaguely smeared with gas lamps. He rang the bell of No. 17.

A woman in black opened the door. She, too, was vague and sinister, with a gas jet burning dimly behind her, and the open door emitting suggestions of frowsiness, and stale cabbage, and worn linoleum, and wet dish-cloths. Hazzard was politely abrupt to her.

"I have come for Miss Avery's trunk. She has made other arrangements."

The woman showed signs of insolence.

"Oh, 'as she! And who are you? When a lidy engages a room——"

Said Hazzard, "I happen to be Miss Avery's doctor. She is not well, and I have made arrangements for her to go elsewhere."

"And I lose my money, do I? Not me. I've just 'ad to turn another lidy away."

Hazzard brought out some silver.

"Miss Avery will pay for two nights. That's fair. How much?"

"The room's 'alf a crown a night."

"One and sixpence. I'll pay you three shillings. Show me the room, please."

He walked in, and the woman accepted the finality of him and the three shillings, for when you live in the shade you are not in a position to argue too truculently. She showed him up the stairs to a back room. It had a surreptitious, stuffy smell. A little black trunk stood at the bottom of the bed.

Hazzard got hold of one of the black metal handles. The thing was not very heavy, but before he carried it down the stairs he had to deal with sudden suspiciousness in the lady.

"How do I know she sent you?"

Hazzard paused on the landing.

"Do you know 'Bennet's Hospital'?"

"I reckon I should know."

"My name is Hazzard, Dr. Hazzard of 'Bennet's Hospital.' Also you can go to the Police Station in Theobald's Road, and ask them if they know Dr. Hazzard. They do."

He had a very shrewd notion that he had satisfied her.

IV

No interested person saw Hazzard arrive at the door of No. 7. Roper's Row carried many things to excess in more ways than one, and probably it would have disapproved of a doctor shouldering baggage, because Roper's Row had its social scale nicely arranged. It ran like the child's alphabet: "D stands for Doctor, who wears a top hat; F stands for Fish-porter, who wears kippers instead." But then Dr. Hazzard was an oddity, and though Roper's Row believed that it knew a gentleman by the cut of his trousers, it was more tolerant of oddities than Holland Park could be. The detached residence, painted cream, with a flight of cement steps, and two bow-windows, and an assortment of painfully twisted iron work and a garden full of clinkers and iris leaves, is doomed to detachment, but not to divagations. You can hear the tight corsage of respectability creaking. Roper's Row had other freedoms, looser laces, less whalebone.

Hazzard carried the trunk in. He bumped it against the gas bracket in the passage, but without doing any damage, for the bracket possessed no globe. The kitchen door at the end of the passage showed a strip of light.

His shoulder ached, and he was a little out of breath, and he set the trunk down at the foot of the stairs. He supposed that Ruth was above in that old room of hers with its memories of seven years ago, memories that were associated with his mother, and suddenly he remembered the incident of the Angus Sandeman Medal. Heavens, how one forgot things; not that he had forgotten his mother, but somehow the figure of Ruth had faded out of the picture. And yet—in her way—she had been an intimate figure. He had trusted her with the carrying out of the last tribute to his mother, and then—had proceeded to forget her.

But the business of the moment was the transferring of that trunk from the ground floor to the upper floor, and he was bending to this business when he heard someone moving in the kitchen. So, she was in there. He left the trunk for a moment, and walking down the passage, opened the kitchen door. Ruth was standing with her back to him, and facing the kitchen dresser; she had just placed a tray full of crockery on the dresser. He saw and understood.

He said, "I thought you had gone upstairs."

She turned to face him for a moment, and he saw that she was wearing an apron, one of Mrs. Duggan's aprons that she had found hanging behind a door.

"I've been upstairs. I found the scullery table full of this——"

"I'm sorry. I'm afraid I had left things in rather a mess. Usually, I wash up last thing at night."

Her eyes had a humid solemnity.

"But—it's so wrong. You shouldn't have to do this."

She was no wilful flatterer. Her responses were very simple and natural. Like a flower she turned her face to the sun; she had remained most strangely virginal. Any apt and circuitous little minx might have put on an apron and contrived the same domestic tableau, for some men are fooled so easily. Their self-regard is caressed and made to purr. But Hazzard had the knack of looking below surfaces, and a curious feeling for the balance of cause and effect.

He said, "I had no trouble about your trunk."

"Do I owe you for anything? I do?"

"I carried it."

She looked shocked.

"Oh, you shouldn't have done that."

"It was the easiest thing to do. I'll take it upstairs for you."

"No, I'll help. I can put these things back presently."

She was so eager to take her share that he humoured her as he would have humoured a child, and between them her trunk ascended to the top floor and was carried into her room. He noticed that the gas-jet had been turned low. She was careful.

"You found the blankets and sheets?"

"Yes."

He crossed the room and turned up the gas-jet.

"Everything all right?"

"Yes, everything."

"Supposing you stay up here and go to bed. I'll put the crockery away. I expect you are pretty tired."

But she produced a gentle obstinacy, and he understood its inspiration and did not snub her longing to help.

"Oh, no, please, do let me. You are being so very good to me."

"All right."

In crossing the landing where the same old gas-jet burned she glanced at the closed door of his laboratory.

"Is that your room still?"

"No, I work there. It's a kind of Bluebeard's chamber."

"Oh, I shan't go in."

She passed lightly down the stairs, and as he followed her he had the impression of a quick, warm-blooded, fluttering bird. She moved as though happily intent upon some business of her own.

Her limbs had lost their heaviness of defeat. The white criss-cross of the apron strings showed up against her black dress. And for a moment he found himself wondering, and thinking in terms of physiology. She was like some piece of warm flesh flushing to perform a natural function.

He paused at the foot of the stairs. He saw her hurry into the kitchen with a pretty, fluttering movement of the forearms. She went straight to the dresser, and began to arrange the plates and cups and saucers on the shelves.

V

On Sunday mornings Roper's Row woke at its leisure. It stretched, and yawned and turned over, and snuggled down again. A few interested cats watched the cans of early milk placed upon doorsteps. In Gray's Inn and Red Lion Square a few yellow leaves fluttered down. The cobbles of Guilford Place were silent. You felt that London was in its slippers, and thinking of nothing but a late breakfast, and the Sunday paper, and a hot dinner midday, and the muffin-man's bell. Bloomsbury still possessed a muffin-man.

Hazzard woke about seven. Sunday to him was a day of books, and of long and precious hours spent in an upper room with microscope and staining reagents and incubators, but on this particular Sunday morning he woke to an unusual sound, a soft thudding of feet overhead. Of course! There was a woman in the house, and he lay and listened to her movements, those gentle and almost secret comings and goings. Had he been rather rash? But poor little beggar. And he was moved to wonder why she was up so early. Going out—perhaps? And he supposed that at any moment she might put her shoes on and he rather disliked the tapping of shoes overhead.

But—no. He heard her door open, and then the soft, gentle shuffling of her stockinged feet upon the stairs. The old stairs creaked and cracked. She went down past his room without a pause, but with a suggestion of solicitude; she crept.

Why this previousness? Had she conceived some sudden panic, and was she taking to flight? He lay and listened, and presently he heard faint sounds, and her secret was revealed. She had slipped down early to light the kitchen fire and to get breakfast ready. But what ought he to do about it? Ought he to do anything?

He lay and meditated upon these feminine activities, and pres-

ently he heard her softly ascending the stairs. There was the faint clink of china. She knocked.

"Hallo."

"I've made you some early tea, Dr. Hazzard. I don't know whether you like it. I'll put the tray down outside your door."

Chapter Twenty-one

I

How and when the idea arrived Hazzard could not say, for at one moment it was not there, and then—behold—it was there. Probably the discovering of it corresponded to the pulling up of a blind, and a sudden flooding of obvious light into the situation's reality.

Ruth had been at No. 7 Roper's Row for a week, and ostensibly she was searching for a new situation, but between these little expeditions in quest of employment were interspersed hours of feminine activity. She made no parade of it. Just as she had put on an apron that first evening, so she assumed her position as worker in the house, and all that Hazzard had to do was observe and reflect and enjoy. She swept and dusted his class room; she made the beds, and cooked, though where and how she had learnt to cook heaven alone knows. She was a presence, submissive, gentle, and very silent. She was not there on the doormat or ready to waylay him in the passage or on the stairs when he returned from his hospital work. Usually she was active in some part of the solitary old house, to be known more by her handiwork than by her person.

Hazzard could not help being aware of the change. Suddenly a load of perfunctory and time-wasting drudgery was removed; he ceased from having to do for himself all those boring things that fall usually to a woman. The kitchen fire was lit, meals got ready, rooms kept clean and in order. The creaking joints of his eccentric establishment were oiled. He found that he had more leisure, though leisure to a man of Hazzard's temperament meant time to do the things he loved.

Hazzard and Ruth took their meals together in the kitchen, but afterwards she would withdraw herself, perhaps with a little, understanding glance at him. She was doing that which her heart bade her do, but without display. She found happiness in doing these things.

At meal-times he would question her.

"Any luck to-day?"

"No, I'm afraid not."

"You have had some fresh air?"

"Oh, yes, quite a long walk. And after dinner—I sat up on the roof."

He had introduced her to his roof-garden. It meant fresh air and sunlight, when there happened to be sunlight.

"What do you do up there,—read?"

"No,—work—mending."

The sort of work she did up there should have been obvious to him, and perhaps it was. His socks and underclothing had been deplorably in need of succour. But her gentle penetration was gradual and a little timid. She asked for things like a shy child. She never worried him with unnecessary questions. Yet as the week went by he became aware of her hands gathering up ravelled threads and straightening them out.

She was gradual. Not till the third morning—at breakfast—did she suggest that she might do the shopping for him.

"I'll be very careful. It will save you time."

He had nothing to say against it. He had handed her over a pound, and in the evening she had presented him with a little bill of costs and the change, seven shillings and threepence. He had glanced at her list of items, and had discovered that she had managed to buy food more cheaply than he could.

On the fourth morning she had reminded him that there was less than a sackful of coal in the small coal-house behind the scullery.

"Shall I order some in?"

"Inevitable, isn't it?"

"Two hundredweight. But—then—it would be cheaper——"

"Yes, order in half a ton."

The coal had to be carried in down the passage, and the boots of coal-porters are the boots of coal-porters, but when Hazzard returned at tea-time he had found the passage guileless.

It being the first Sunday in October, and the second Sunday of Ruth's sojourn in the land, Hazzard looked out of his upper window and saw that the day was good. The big poplar flickered its leaves at him. It occurred to him that Ruth must have had a lonely week, and that on a sunny day in October, perhaps one of the last sunny days of the year, she ought to be out gathering sunlight and hæmoglobin. At breakfast he suggested that she might like to go out and see her friends, and she appeared to consider the suggestion, perhaps because he had made it.

"I shouldn't disturb you if I stayed in."

"But haven't you any friends?"

"No."

"But you ought to get out. I shall be working all the morning. Is there anywhere you would like to go?"

With her eyes on the butter dish she confessed that she would like to go to Hampton Court.

"Well, why not?"

Her hesitating silence carried the question further.

"I don't think I want to go alone."

"No. I see."

But he saw other possibilities with sudden and unexpected clearness. He was surprised at himself. But then—it would be like taking a child out to pick primroses.

He said, "It might do me good. Supposing we both go?"

He saw her eyes light up. She said nothing for the moment. She glanced at his cup to see if he were ready for more tea.

"You work so hard. I'm sure you ought to get out sometimes."

So they went to Hampton Court, and on this golden October day, with the dew remaining on the grass, and the trees dropping a few yellow leaves in the windless sunlight, they sat on a seat facing the long border rather like father and child. That was Hazzard's attitude. But it had other implications. She sat there beside him, looking at the massed colours of dahlias and autumn asters, or watching the other people, but always with an air of waiting upon the man at her side. Her eyes had an expectancy. If he said anything, and he did not say much to begin with, she listened with her chin tilted, and a little incipient smile trembling about her mouth.

She led no chorus; she was an echo, and yet her gentleness and her naïveté had reality. In her way she could be as definite as the most masculine of women, but her definiteness was feminine. She could listen and wait; she had no tawdry chatter, nor was she concerned with producing the cheap and quick effect, perhaps because in her sensitive way she could wonder at beauty and be silent. You might have compared her to a bunch of dark grapes on an old vine. So many bright young women are like overtrimmed hats.

Hazzard said something about the dignity of other days. Also he told her that there was a Dutch garden to be seen. He himself had seen it once many years ago. And she asked him innocently what a Dutch garden was like, and he replied that when she had seen it she would know, for explaining a garden was rather like writing a paragraph about a picture. The thing was to see the picture.

She pondered that saying of his very solemnly. Hazzard had

never known flatter, and if she assumed him to be a great man he was quite unaware of it.

"I used to have a friend who painted pictures. We went to the Tate Gallery—sometimes—on Saturdays."

"Does he still paint pictures?"

"It was a she. No, she's married. Three children."

"Were they good pictures?"

"Not very good—I'm afraid."

He smiled.

"Probably—she's better at children. I'm rather fond of children; sick children."

Her eyes were the eyes of a ready listener.

"I'm rather afraid of some children."

"The little bull-heads——"

There was a moment's silence, and then he produced that most unexpected of questions.

"Do you want to go on working in a shop?"

The question was crucial, so crucial to her that she closed her eyes for a moment, and then opened them very wide as though confronting reality.

"No. I don't think I'm made for that."

He observed her. She was looking up at the old brickwork of the palace.

"Just how are you made?"

"I like doing things. I've always wanted to do the things that women do who don't have to go out to work."

"But that's work."

"I suppose it is. And most girls grumble. Somehow—I can't quite understand that. Is it the way we are made?"

She looked up at him with her face aslant.

"I suppose some men would hate your work?"

"Probably. My work's my religion."

Her response came slowly, while one of her hands caressed the back of the wooden seat.

"I suppose a woman's work could be the same."

He appeared to consider life for a moment, and then he asked her that most momentous question. He saw—and yet he was blind.

"Would you care to stay at No. 7? It's not offering you much. As my—housekeeper—I mean? I could afford to let you have a woman in to do some of the heavy work."

Her silence suggested breathlessness. She sat very still. She was so much without guile that she did not realize that he was offering

her everything and nothing, or something that many women would have assumed to be an intrigue or an insult. He was offering her reality. He saw it as reality, and so did she.

"I'd love to, Dr. Hazzard."

"But do you think it would be too much for you?"

"Oh, no."

He had the absurdly grave face of a physician.

"If so, there's your health to be considered. A walk every day; half an hour's rest after meals. Not too much tea. We've got to be practical about things."

Her face looked tremulous. Practical! Was not the most practical of women also a prophetess? She wanted to do things, but she wanted to do them for him.

"You mean it, really?"

"Well, won't it suit us both? And if you get tired of it, or find it too much, don't be afraid."

"One doesn't get tired doing the things one likes. Not tired, I mean, in that dead sort of way. I'll—I'll do my very best."

II

So this most unconventional partnership began, and yet it had its own conventions, though each partner viewed them from a different vantage point. According to his scheme of living Hazzard had done a thing that was so supremely sane that it was balanced on the fine edge of sanity. He was a rational man, and to a world moulded on emotion rational man appears either mad or bad, or as a smug opportunist. Not for one moment did Hazzard feel the affair as an ordinary man would have felt it. He was all brain, with the physical part of him asleep after years of a devoted celibacy. He had—in a way—lived the life of a recluse, or like a Stylites on a pillar. All his energies were absorbed in his work, his whole attention fixed on it, and existence was an orderly routine subordinated to the adventure of seeking and finding.

In Ruth he had secured a working housekeeper, and also—he had secured an unrealized devotion. The domestic functioning of No. 7 Roper's Row assumed a new smoothness. Though he did have feelings about the affair they followed a certain habit of feeling that had become associated with his work. Somehow, he could not see Ruth in any other way save as a grown-up child. It was her quality of seeming childishness that had made the appeal and the partnership possible. He did not question his compassion. He had seen her like a lost child, sick and in trouble and be-

wildered, and he had—so to speak—taken her by the hand. Even his compassion was absurdly logical.

It did not occur to him to consider public opinion, perhaps because he had spent a large part of his life in opposition to the prejudices of the conventional. Hostility had not made him servile; it had rendered him either callous or indifferent. And possibly it did not occur to him to wonder whether his rather obscure private affairs could have any interest for the world at large. He was not interested in the world at large; he was interested in his sick children and in his bacteriological researches. He had his eye to the microscope. As for Roper's Row he would have paid no more attention to its gossipings than he would have done to the bawlings of an inebriated Covent Garden porter. He would have got up and closed the window.

Ruth made things smooth. Absorbed though Hazzard was he had his moments of relaxation when he was aware of her and her affairs, and found pleasure in contemplating them. They took their meals together, but not in the kitchen. She had raised the status of breakfast and dinner to the level of the first floor sitting-room. Many things were different, the food, the table, the atmosphere. In his solitary days he had kept a book propped up against the teapot or the water-jug, but he had discarded the book. He remembered that she was very much alone.

He talked to her as he would have talked to an intelligent child, with a kind of artlessness, and assuming that she would be interested in the day's doings, which she was. She had no air of expecting him to talk to her, but waited with quiet and attentive eyes. He began to notice her smile, and to expect it. When she smiled her face and eyes lit up in a remarkable way.

Every Monday he handed her over the money for the week, and on the first day of each month he placed her month's salary in a sealed white envelope on the breakfast table, and very soon he was made to realize that she was clever with money as she seemed clever with everything that concerned the economics and æsthetics of a house. She fed him well. Her cooking improved. She contrived to buy flowers, even in winter. Moreover she managed to save money, but over the disposal of these savings there was a little argument.

"Wouldn't it be nice for you to have some new curtains?"

He glanced at the sitting-room curtains. They were ugly and shabby, tapestry in which greens and yellows mingled on a black ground, but to Hazzard as curtains they were very good curtains, and all that he required. They did what was expected of them.

"Anything the matter with them? Moth?"

She said, "I could make you something so much prettier. They are very old."

"Wouldn't they last?"

"Oh, yes. But if you would let me buy some material out of the money I save."

He glanced again at the curtains. He had bought them second-hand five years ago. Certainly, they had a liverish look, and were not the kind of curtains you would put up in a child's nursery. Also, it did occur to him that Ruth might like pretty things, and since the running of the house was her affair he ought to allow her a little play.

"All right, get something new. Can you do anything with the old ones?"

"They'll do for underlays—on the beds. I shan't waste them."

"Right. We will have new curtains."

Her face lit up. It was extraordinary how easily she was pleased, and how pleasant she looked when she was pleased.

"I shan't waste your money. I know where I can get a bargain, a pretty chintz or cretonne. Of course—I'll make them up myself."

Almost subconsciously he had accepted the fact that she was pleasant to look at, and that her face at the table had something that a book lacked, though he had not realized that Providence had been very merciful to him. He acquired the devotion of an unique creature, a child of peculiar gentleness. He knew very little about women. He had not stumbled upon the most obvious conclusion, that with nine women out of ten a relationship such as existed between himself and Ruth would have been impossible. Nine women out of ten would have made it impossible. They would have demanded other forms of self-expression; they would have expected a little flattery; they might have resented his tacit acceptance of their ministrations. They would have had a good case against Hazzard. And probably, the average girl, after spending a month with such a man, would have put on her hat and vanished. He was such a cool customer. He appeared to take so much for granted. He had no notion of playing up to a woman.

But Ruth was the tenth woman. She was the type of woman who may be despised by her more enterprising sisters, especially so by the new sex. She was too gentle; she made a silk doormat of herself: she had no voice. She was a devoted, sentimental little idiot who ran about and did things for a man.

The fact remains that the devoted, sentimental little idiot may sometimes be woman—and a happy woman. As the physiologist

in Hazzard would have put it, she was exercising a function. Nor was Hazzard an ordinary sort of man. In seeing him as the unusual man Ruth would have been wiser than her sisters. The unwise virgin carries no oil in life's lamp.

III

For, to Ruth Avery, No. 7 Roper's Row was a child's playbox, and much more than that—for it was the first playbox of her very own that she had possessed. She was responsible for it, and so, both in the practical and mystical sense, it was hers. Also it was Hazzard's.

Moreover, she did not expect him to be different from what he was—a man absorbed in the greatest of adventures. Her sex was veiled. She was able to look at him through the soft shimmer of this veil and to experience the little tranquil breathing of her trust and her contentment. She was happy because she was not conscious of rights and privileges other than those she had, and did not sit down to think how she could exact other tributes from him.

She did not want Hazzard altered. She had to have her hero, and her hero had ceased to be lame, though a woman does not love a man just because he is learned and wise and kind. She loves him for all manner of strange reasons, and Ruth loved Hazzard because he was Hazzard and because he was poor. His comparative poverty brought him nearer to her and down to the simple level of her devotion. It enabled her to contrive and plan, and it allowed her to feel an intimate delight in being the little partner of her great man. Temperamentally she was not exacting. Her impulse was, "What can I give?" and not "What can I get?"

Judging by appearances, she had made no difference to the deliberate purpose of Hazzard's career. Life went on as before; his work was still an inspired frenzy, and she would wonder at him and feel sure that no man could be more clever than he was. The inevitableness of his future seemed to her a thing assured. He would be the great physician, *facile princeps*, a man to whom half the world would come to be healed. Had he not told her that next year he hoped to be on the staff at "Bennet's"? To her, the steps appeared clean-cut. She saw him going up and up; a little, grave, purposeful figure; and, in a way, she associated herself with his future. She might have feared it, had she had clutching hands; she would have feared it not at all had she realized that clutching hands do not hold.

But No. 7 was different—not consciously so, but by implication.

For Hazzard, like a man sitting at work at his desk, with a rose in a vase beside him, would sometimes forget his work for a moment to look at the flower and find himself surprised by its colour and its texture.

He looked in this way at Ruth. He looked at her in this particular way one Sunday afternoon when he had taken his woman-child to see the last of the autumn leaves on the trees in Hyde Park. They had ridden on the top of a bus to Marble Arch, and the west wind and the air seemed to have kindled her face.

He said, like a man making a surprising discovery:

"You look very much better!"

Her eyes should have told him why!

"Oh, I'm quite well—now."

"More fresh air, and better food."

Of course, the wise man had to be allowed his wisdom, but she might have told him that, if "man does not live by bread alone," neither does woman.

But the observer in him was piqued. He began to study her with a more personal attentiveness. It really was extraordinary how much better she looked. Her pale face had a little colour under its creaminess; her eyes were vital and had lost that shadow of apprehension. In fact, she was happy!

He recorded the apparent fact that housework appeared to suit some women. He remarked on it to her.

"Yes, it seems to have done you a lot of good. Getting about, and doing things."

Her smile was inward.

"I told you I was interested in doing things."

"Don't do too much. Did you have the charwoman in this week?"

"Just for one morning."

"That's right. Or Roper's Row will think I'm a slave-driver."

Chapter Twenty-two

I

THERE was one room at No. 7 which Ruth had not entered—Hazzard's "Bluebeard Chamber"; but on one Sunday morning he stood at the top of the stairs and called to her.

"Ruth!"

"Yes, Doctor."

"I want you for five minutes."

She had been clearing away the breakfast things, and she ran up the stairs, and arriving with a pretty air of haste and breathlessness found him standing in the open doorway of the upper room. He looked serious, but not more so than usual. He had a way of looking serious even when he was being kind. She had never heard him laugh; she did not expect him to laugh. As a child, she had spent wet Sunday afternoons in a little Devonshire farm, turning over the pages of Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, and sometimes Hazzard's face reminded her of the gravely exultant and suffering face of a man whose eyes saw beyond Death, and whose courage was unquenchable.

He looked at her kindly.

"Ruth, I want to show you this room."

"Yes, Dr. Hazzard."

He remained for a moment in the doorway; he had more to say.

"It's the one room for which you are not responsible. I'd like you to know why, because—I don't want you to feel that I have any other reason for keeping you out of it other than its being rather like a powder magazine."

She opened her lips to speak, but he went on: "You do everything so well, that I had a feeling that you might wonder. Do you see? This place is full of deadly little fellows."

She understood. He had praised her. And he was wishing her to understand that he had no secrets and that she was trusted.

"I've never wanted to interfere."

"Oh, you're not clumsy; you wouldn't knock things over; but, as I said—well, come in and look round."

To Ruth it was her great man's room—a strange chamber, yet not unlike a clean and well-kept kitchen. The black incubator sug-

gested a gas-cooker. The microscope explained itself; so did the white sink with hot and cold water laid on. But the test-tubes, bottles and dishes were the paraphernalia of a mysterious ritual. She saw rows and rows of test-tubes standing in wooden racks—each plugged with a wad of cotton-wool and neatly labelled. There were round glass dishes into which had been poured neat circles of jelly—or what looked to her like jelly. And there were bottles—bottles of all shapes and sizes, and some of them containing queer lumps of tissue floating in a pale fluid. Hazzard's laboratory stool—a tall, four-legged tower—stood by the table under the window. Two white linen coats hung on pegs. A powerful electric light was so arranged that at night its box-reflector concentrated the light upon the wooden table.

There was something in a white china dish covered with a veil of gauze; but before she could ask what it was Hazzard had moved forward and transferred the dish to one of the shelves.

"Makes quite a cheerful room to work in!"

She agreed. She was looking out of the window at the bare branches of the big poplar. The sun was shining. Little drifts of smoke passed across the pale blue sky.

"What's in all those funny glass tubes?"

"Bacteria—germs; the little fellows who make us ill."

"Are they dead?"

"By George, no! Very much alive, some of them."

"Can you see them?"

"Like to look at a germ?"

"I should."

He bent over the microscope. There was a slide on the stage and he focused the preparation and then told her to look.

"Close one eye. That's it; see anything?"

"No—yes—no, I'm not sure!"

"Perhaps it wants focusing for you; how's that?"

"Oh, yes, I can see something—little yellow dots."

"Quite. They don't look very exciting, do they? That gentleman is known as 'Staphylococcus Aureus.' "

"Is he very dangerous?"

"Not half so deadly as some of the others."

She did not ask to be shown any of the more deadly gentlemen, for she had seen the germ of the thing that mattered. She drew back, looking a little flushed. She put back a loop of hair from her forehead.

"Don't you have to be very careful? It's almost like living among wild animals, isn't it?"

"Yes, one has to be careful. If I dipped a needle into one of those tubes, and then pricked my finger——"

She drew in her breath.

"And you're not afraid?"

"Never think about it. But there is something I wanted to say. It occurred to me that you might feel more comfortable in a room downstairs. There is the back bedroom on the next floor. It is quite a good room."

"I'm not afraid."

"No. But I don't think there is any need for you to sleep next door to all these creatures."

She was gently submissive.

"I'll do just what you wish. Shall I disturb you if I move my things now?"

"Not a bit. No time like the present."

So she set about making the change. The back second-floor room had not been used since Mr. Robert Crapp had vacated it, and Hazzard might have heard her going softly up and down the stairs. Perhaps he did hear her, as a man hears the play of the wind in the trees when he is sitting in garden or orchard with a book on his knees. He may be intent on the book and not consciously aware of dappled sunlight and the breathings of Nature. The atmosphere is his, and yet not wholly his. Some other personality may be penetrating it and suffusing it with a secret essence.

In the room below, Ruth was hanging up clothes in a wardrobe and softly opening and shutting drawers. Her face and her eyes were as soft as her movements. She had the air of making a little, happy murmuring—the moving of her spirit amid the leaves of her consciousness. She was feeling proud. He had praised her; she had been admitted to his Holy of Holies, and she smoothed skirts and petticoats and, with a kind of happy deftness, packed underclothing and blouses and nighties neatly away.

She had order in her life—activities, simple accomplishings. She functioned; but, even as a gland that functions has some secretive stimulus for other tissues, so her functioning had its significant influence upon the metabolism of No. 7 Roper's Row. And Hazzard —perched on his stool—gravely and happily intent upon his work —was bathed in the gentle juices of her devotion.

That winter he was working upon the toxins of the Klebs Loeffler Bacillus and also upon the sensitiveness of the Tubercle Bacillus to the presence of certain reagents in very dilute solution. Diphtheria, as a disease, was being logically countered, though the technique of some of its later manifestations was still obscure. Why

was there Neuritis—especially Neuritis of the vagus nerve? Did a particular bacillus produce not one toxin but several, and had one's antitoxin to be a multiple product in order to neutralize all the effects of the toxin? As for the Bacillus of Tubercle—it was still defiant and entrenched. Hazzard could remember the tragic sense of frustration that had followed the use of Koch's tuberculin. The White Death had seemed on the edge of being challenged; all the world over, the unfortunates had turned eyes of hope towards the figure of that German doctor. And then—disillusionment! The vaccine had failed and not only had it failed, but, in some cases, it had set the disease flaring. If Hazzard had admiration and sympathy for any man, he had them for Koch. To discover so much; to promise so much—and then, to be balked! Oh, bitter moments! But Koch had greatness; patiently, quietly, he had gone back to work. That was it—patience, courage, an indomitable perseverance; a thoroughness that was fanatical. You might be nothing but an obscure little figure perched on a stool and squinting for years down a brass tube, or preparing your cultures and carrying out your inoculations. The answer to the riddle was there. The human body did deal with and kill or encyst the Bacillus of Tubercle. But, how to get at the little beast in the lungs of those people whose cells had failed to quash the intruder? Yes, that was the problem. Possibly no man would solve it. The solution would be provided by the patient labours of the many.

II

Sundry young men, arriving at the door of No. 7 Roper's Row at the hour when Hazzard took his evening class, found the front door locked. The usual procedure could not be followed. One of them rang the bell, and, with his hands in his pockets, did a double shuffle on the pavement, for the night was cold.

"What's happened to old Blizzard?"

"Down the drain chasing Bacillus Typhosus. I say, must be a rummy sort of house. Camps out all by himself, doesn't he?"

Someone opened the door, and the gas-jet burning in the passage showed to these young men the figure of a girl. She was wearing a white apron edged with blue.

She said, "Will you come in, please. Dr. Hazzard was called to a dangerous case but he will be back at any moment. He left word that you were to wait in the lecture room."

The young men trailed into the passage and proceeded to hang their hats and coats on the pegs in the passage; and the girl, hav-

ing closed the door, slipped past them down the passage and disappeared. She had shown no interest in them but had treated them as so many anonymous and necessary young males who came to No. 7 for spoon-feeding.

The students—Third Year men who had failed to pass in anatomy and physiology—collected in the class room round the oil stove which, as a rule, smelt rather strongly of paraffin; but on this particular evening there was no smell of oil; also a pan of water had been placed upon the top of the stove. These young men, still very much in the hobbledehoy stage which yet contrived to consider itself Londonish and sophisticated, lit cigarettes and drew up the yellow wooden chairs.

"A woman's touch—what!"

"That dusky little bit of goods hasn't been on view before."

"I say, ever seen a skeleton dance?"

One of them removed the skeleton from its bracket and, holding it by the scruff of its neck, was making the thing do an absurd patter on the floor-boards with its bony feet, when the front door bell rang.

"Hallo, there's Mr. Bun from Bart's."

"I say, you chaps, let's give the skivvy a start."

"Don't be an ass."

"She's seen it before, my dear, you bet. She's probably seen old Blizzard in his——"

So, when Ruth came down the passage to answer the bell, she had that giggling, grinning bag of bones thrust at her suddenly from the class room doorway. She let out a little yelp; her two hands flew to her bosom; she fell back against the opposite wall.

"Oh, you shouldn't."

The dangler of the skeleton looked at her a little sheepishly. Also her panic and her air of breathlessness were attractive.

"It's all right. Nothing to be frightened of. We've all got this sort of thing inside us."

She did not look at him. She recovered herself; she let her hands fall from her bosom and went to the door and opened it. She was mute. She reclosed the door on two overcoated figures and went swiftly back down the passage, passing the open doorway of the class room with face averted.

Said someone with facetious severity: "Thomas, you have offended the young lady. How could you?"

The holder of the skeleton raised the thing's right arm till the bony thumb made contact with the nasal bones.

"Rot! Come in, you chaps. Old Blizzard's got a case on somewhere."

He returned the skeleton to its bracket, and one of the newcomers, warming his hands over the stove, showed himself a man of the world.

"Who's the lady? Old Blizzard's latest model?"

"Ask us another."

"Nice little bit. Got smoked eyes."

"Smoked haddocks! I say, we are going to lick you at Rugger next week."

"Lick us! I bet you you don't cross our line. What about last year? Three goals and five tries to nil."

"We're hot stuff this year."

"Oh, are you? That's news!"

III

So it became known at "Bennet's" that No. 7 Roper's Row held more than anatomical diagrams and a collection of hard chairs and a skeleton. It contained a skeleton that was clothed with flesh and had a head of dusky hair, and dark eyes, and an air of significant aloofness. And, from the male point of view, the interior of No. 7 Roper's Row had ceased to be a study of still life. The section was stained red. Young men entering at night would loiter and stand staring down the passage at a door that showed chinks of light. Something feminine was in there—something youngish and pretty, a little piece of pastry with plum jam in the middle of it. The young male is apt to be thoughtless in his indiscriminating discrimination, and if he sees sex and its manifestations everywhere, and makes a joke of it, he is but obeying Nature.

In fact, there were one or two young men among those who came to be coached by Hazzard who tried to follow up a possible adventure. If Old Blizzard happened to have a pretty cook-housekeeper, well—wasn't the provocation obvious? What did a solemn devil like Hazzard want with a pretty girl in his house? Some perfumes are irresistible. Two young men, tempted by the same urge, and realizing that it would be quite easy to turn up at No. 7 a quarter of an hour before the official time, did so—only to arrive within ten seconds of each other. Ruth was about to close the door on the first, when the second turned up. She kept the front door locked till eight, and at eight o'clock those who came were expected to walk straight into the lecture room.

"You must be early."

"My watch says three minutes to eight."

"Dr. Hazzard's still upstairs."

She left them to foregather rather sheepishly, by the class room stove—each suspecting the purpose of the other's previousness. She had no suspicions. They were the mere accessories of her great man's daily routine and she was absorbed in making smooth the path of that routine. The two young Juans talked hospital rugger to each other with a rather exaggerated appearance of friendliness.

One of the two possessed more persistence and more cheek. A little sallow, soapy youngster, with an oiled black head and two little black-currant eyes stuffed into his sallowness, he repeated the experiment. He happened to be a nephew of the eminent Mr. Thomas Tate, senior surgeon at "Bennet's." Again his watch was twenty minutes in advance, and on this occasion no other little dog was sniffing at the door of No. 7.

"Hallo, I'm not early again, am I?"

Ruth had opened the door to him. His voice was gaillard and intimate; his face smeared with smiles.

"It's only a quarter to eight."

"Your clock must be wrong."

She did not argue the point. He was no concern of hers and she was in the midst of washing up the supper-things, though she could not help being conscious of the flow of his friendliness. He loitered in the passage and stood in her way while he took off his overcoat.

"Dr. Hazzard in?"

"He's upstairs working."

Innocently indifferent, she waited for him to let her pass. Her hands were damp; she had been drying plates.

"Devil for work, isn't he? Find it dull here?"

She wished he would get out of her way.

"It's never dull when you have plenty to do."

"Ever go to The Empire? Fine show on there, just now."

"No, I don't."

He transferred a handkerchief from one cuff to the other.

"That's a pity. What are you doing?"

And suddenly she appeared to realize him and his insinuations. She looked just a little frightened. She edged against the wall.

"I've plenty to do. I want to get by, please."

She brushed past him, and he stood for a moment irresolute, smirking, and then started to follow her down the passage.

"I say, come to The Empire one evening."

Her answer was a swift slamming of the kitchen door, and a turning of the key in the lock.

She said nothing to Hazzard about young Tate, but in the future she left the front door unlocked after half-past seven and responded to no more adventurous bells. Any Juan who arrived prematurely had to stand on the doorstep or make his own way in. Also, she kept the kitchen door locked until she heard Hazzard coming down the stairs.

She was scared. No. 7 had seemed to her so safe and sacred, and yet even into No. 7 Roper's Row an irresponsible and merciless maleness penetrated!

IV

Youth had other and occasional glimpses of her, but her face was consciously veiled, and her eyes looked elsewhere.

It became known that no fun was to be had at No. 7 Roper's Row. Also, young Tate could add to the situation the proceeds of a coincidence. He happened to have "digs" somewhere on the other side of Regent's Park, and on one Sunday afternoon he overtook two people walking in the Park. The man's lame foot was the heel of Achilles.

Inevitably, young Tate had a tale to tell.

"I say, you chaps, I saw Old Blizzard out on Sunday, walking with the skivvy."

"What, that little dark bit of goods?"

"That's the lady."

"Well, I'm damned! Fancy Old Blizzard keeping a girl! It's absolutely priceless."

Then there was that subsequent occasion, when young Tate dined with his uncle and aunt. Young Tate dined at Harley Street once a month. Old Tate called it, "fathering the pup." But he allowed young Tate a glass of port and a cigar and twenty minutes' chattering among the mahogany and the old china. Old Tate had a perky, inquisitive, prying debonairness and a fund of stories. He liked to tell a story and was not above accepting one—for listening to a young man's arch and jocund gossip renewed his youth.

"I suppose you've heard the joke about Dr. Hazzard, sir?"

"Not scandal, I hope?"

"Well, just a little bit, sir. But it's so awfully funny. It really is."

Obviously, Mr. Thomas Tate had to be told the tale, nor was it told without the usual embellishments. Young Tate sniggered out the story, but his uncle heard it with an assumption of stiffness and of disapproval. Hazzard's whole attitude to life was so damnably unprofessional and indelicate. This sort of thing would not

do. It might do for a raw student but not for a responsible physician who was proposing to offer himself for election to the honorary staff of the Hospital.

The elder Tate frowned over his coffee cup.

"Better not talk about such affairs, my lad. Probably it's exaggerated."

"Well, it's a Hospital joke, sir."

"Tut, tut. One of the things you young fellows have to realize is that a professional man's reputation has to be above reproach."

"Well, I can't help it, sir, if Dr. Hazzard——"

"But it's bad for the Hospital. Can't you appreciate the fact, Bill, that a man has no right to behave like an Outside, when he's filling a responsible post? It isn't done, my lad, it isn't done."

Mr. Tate showed fierceness.

"I have always fought for a high standard, in public and in private. A man with a smirched sexual reputation is a pest. Oh, yes, I know—you young fellows think us a trifle pompous and strait-laced. But a professional man is damned if his domestic affairs are crooked."

The elder Tate might show himself a moralist, and yet the younger man got the impression that his uncle was pleased.

Chapter Twenty-three

I

In the spring of the year, Hazzard's innocence showed the absurd whiteness of its plumage, though to other eyes it might have appeared as the grey of indifference or the black of a blackguard's cynicism. We see that which we wish to see—save only those devoted few whose impartial eyes seek that which is.

Hazzard was going down to Melfont. He had not been to Melfont during the winter. He had been busy, absorbed; but when the baskets of the flower-sellers were yellow with daffodils, the west wind touched him. The visionary in him stirred, for he still had his vision though he looked so long and so steadily at the infinitely little. But going down to Melfont meant leaving Ruth alone at No. 7. Also, while visualizing her as a child, he could be moved to ask himself why the child should not share his two days in the country. She, too, might delight in the west wind blowing over the top of Sisbury. Also, with immense gradualness, he had come to feel unconsciously at his ease in Ruth's presence; she was like a bunch of flowers in a vase—to be missed when the vase was empty. The idea of her going to Melfont with him gave him pleasure. Probably she was becoming more necessary to him than he knew. He did not analyse motives. Possibly he thought of her as "Poor little Ruth," but the use of a diminutive may imply a background of tenderness.

He put it to her one evening when she was clearing away the supper-things, and she coloured up, and looked down at the tray in her hands.

"It would be lovely."

"You can stay with an old friend of my mother's. It will do you good."

Her innocence matched his, save that hers was more self-conscious.

"But who will look after the guinea-pigs?"

He had forgotten the guinea-pigs. Ruth had made herself responsible for the little furry creatures in their cages. She fed them and named them and fondled them. She had felt troubled over the guinea-pigs and their fate. There had been trouble between her and Hazzard over them. For somehow she had felt hurt and

shocked when she had come to understand that these little creatures were martyrs in the cause of Science. Peter, a white and brown gentleman, had gone up to the laboratory in a little special cage, and in due course he had come down to be buried in the back garden under a sooty old holly.

Ruth had shed tears over Peter, and Hazzard had discovered his woman-child in tears. He had questioned her tears, just as he would have questioned the tears of a child.

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, must you do it?"

"Do what?"

"The guinea-pigs."

In a flash he had understood, and had found himself touched by her softness. She was not a fool-woman making a moan over man's cruelty to fleas; and very gently he had explained to her why he had to use the creatures, and what his purpose was.

"It is for the sake of the children, to try and find out things that will help to save pain and sickness. I shouldn't do it, Ruth, unless I knew—and was sure that it was necessary."

She had shown him glistening, gentle eyes.

"I know you wouldn't; you couldn't be cruel."

Her faith in him was sufficient, and yet her qualms were never wholly appeased. She would feed the little creatures on secret dainties. She had asked Hazzard that she might not be told when one of the pigs had to go to its fate.

"All right, you shan't know. Don't count them."

She did not count them, and whenever he had to remove a victim he took care to buy a substitute and so make up the number. Also, he discovered himself infected by her compassion. He did what he had to do with more compunction; he handled the little animal with a consciousness of her gentle hands.

"But, as to Melfont and the live stock?"

"I can manage that. I'll get one of the Lab. attendants at the Hospital to come round and feed them. I can leave him the front door key."

She was satisfied. She had her inward glow. She was going with him to see his old home—the place where his mother had lived. She could remember being kissed by his mother.

"It's good of you—to think——"

She was suffused with little, secret exultations. She radiated something as she stood there, with eyes downcast. And Hazzard looked at her with sudden attentiveness. She was the same Ruth —and yet different.

"Well, I didn't like the idea of leaving you alone here."

He sounded brusque, and her eyelids flickered.

"Besides,—country. Do you good. You work very hard here. I'd like you to enjoy yourself."

Her annunciation had sounded.

She seemed to hear the murmur of a mysterious voice.

She went out with the tray.

II

Mrs. Tribute had no Platonic illusions. She assumed the obvious, and all the more so when she had touched and seen and appraised her Ruth. Mrs. Sarah, being an affectionate soul, liked somebody whom she could mother, and "my dear"—a cosy creature, not one of your hipless women with the legs of a man, and a flat chest. She preferred a woman to be round. And Ruth had curves, and, in the dusk, the face of a harvest moon.

"I don't know how ye'll manage with a feather bed, dearie."

Ruth was sure that she would manage very well. She had her face to a lattice and was looking along the Avon Valley, with the young green of the year filling it. She saw smoke rising, and the brow of a great hill cutting the sun in half.

"It's so kind of you to take me in."

"Well, I tell 'ee, some of us think great things of Dr. Christopher; and so do you, maybe?"

She was arch with Ruth, having no doubt at all but that Ruth was Hazzard's young lady. Housekeeper indeed! A sweet pretty thing like that! For Mrs. Sarah had not lived sixty or more years in a village community without becoming wise as to the eyes and mouth, and the voice of a girl; lips should be full but not too full; and if eyes were brown, they should be of a gentle, steadfast brownness, and without any red in them. A reddish-brown eye and kinky black hair were danger signals. For Mrs. Sarah would say: "Don't 'ee go walking with a girl with pin-point eyes—specially if her hair be like black wire—all curled up and tight."

Mary Hazzard's cottage was a hundred yards away, and the daffodils were out, and polyanthus beginning to spread a border of velvet and lace along the edge of the brick path. Fruit buds were swelling, and the elder-trees were in young leaf; and Ruth had a little spray of blue forget-me-not in her black hat. She walked from Mrs. Tribute's to Hazzard's cottage to make tea for him, and on the way she met a very fat woman waddling towards Melfont, carrying a black waterproof bag. Mrs. Prosser loitered

until she had seen Ruth enter the garden gate of the Hazzard cottage, and so had her piece of news sizzling nicely in the afternoon's frying-pan.

"Young Hazzard's brought a gel down with him."

To Melfont, Hazzard was still "young Hazzard"; while to the students of "Bennet's" he appeared as a sort of primeval creature that had emerged full-grown and ancient from the egg.

Ruth found Hazzard in the garden, standing with his back to the river, and his face in the sunlight. He had been looking at the lie of the land, with the eyes of a creative vision—for on such a day in April the urge of the year and of man was forward; and as Ruth came down the path he emerged from his dreaming and saw her as a figure in his dream. He saw her as woman—gentle and ministering, a creature who could grow dewy-eyed over a dead guinea-pig; not as his woman—but as a figure that was both symbolical and real. She should be the grown child in charge of other children—the little mother and matron. He had prejudices against the nurse who was nothing but a nurse.

Pausing under one of the apple-trees she said: "I have come to make your tea." She could say the simplest of things with such an air of wide-eyed wisdom that her sayings became wise with an essential simplicity, and somehow, as she stood there, she became a part of that world that had manifested itself in the presence of his mother. He realized that two women who were so unlike could yet be strangely alike. And why? Had they the same human meaning for him?

"Settled down all right at the cottage?"

"Oh, yes; I have a little window that looks up at that big hill."

"Sisbury; like to climb up it after tea?"

She nodded. She looked sleek and smooth, and serenely submissive. She seemed to grow in this green place. Her eyes had the play of brown water.

"Isn't it lovely?"

"No country like it."

He, too, was different. He had his hill mood on him. He was aware of those rolling, speculative horizons; the great open sky; and the little secret valleys where men dwelt under grey roofs. The hills were so grey, and the valleys so green.

"Shepherds' country. Did you hear the ewes and the lambs as we came along?"

"Yes, and I saw them—lovely things."

He was smiling. He was thinking of her both as Ruth and Mary. And, Mary had a little lamb and its fleece was white as that great

cloud over Sisbury. What a country for children and lambs! There was shelter and there was sun; and the very wind was alive. Yes, perhaps some day he would build his dream house here for sick children—a memorial to his mother. He could not do all that Dr. Rollin was doing at Leysin, for England was not Switzerland; but he could do much.

With a kind of gentle abruptness he said: "Well, let's go in, and have tea."

III

In Mary Hazzard's parlour the same table stood in the same place—a pedestal table with three clawed feet, mahogany of the George III period. To-day its centre was covered by a small blue-and-white check-pattern cloth. Mrs. Tribute had lit a fire in the high grate—because a fire made a cheerful showing, and the cottage needed airing. Also, Mrs. Sarah had placed the tea-tray just where Mary Hazzard had always liked to have it—so that she had the fire on her right hand and the window on her left. A glass celery-vase full of daffodils occupied the centre of the blue-and-white cloth.

When Ruth sat down to pour out tea, she took both the chair and the place that had been Mary Hazzard's. She did not know it, but Hazzard knew it and was moved by the memory, and by its reincarnation in the body of Ruth. He watched her pour out his tea, adding to it just that one lump of sugar and plenty of milk. Her whole attitude—the movements of her hands, her air of gentle and deliberate seriousness, reminded him of his mother. He had shifted his chair slightly so that the glass vase and its daffodils did not hide Ruth from him. He was looking at Ruth as he had not looked at her before. She had ceased to be an adventitious figure. She appeared to him to be part of the room—sitting there in his mother's chair, and attaching to herself memories and associations, and a kind of rightness. He had a feeling that it was pleasant to see her sitting there. She belonged, just as the fire and the brown teapot and the flowers belonged.

He said, "My mother used to sit there."

She gave him a sudden, wide-eyed look, and her hand trembled slightly as she passed him his cup of tea. She was conscious of the intentness of his eyes; they seemed to look into her—at the inward essential woman in her. They were unsmiling and very grave, for he had suddenly remembered that no one else had ever sat in that chair; that he had kept it empty and sacred. But Ruth was sitting there, and his memories were not offended.

Her eyes fell; she began to pour out her own tea.

"I hope—you don't mind—I didn't know!"

He continued to look at her for a moment.

"No, you couldn't know. Don't move."

But if Ruth had slipped into his mother's chair, she also had assumed other qualities. She was there to listen, as one particular woman will listen to one particular man. Moods may adapt themselves to atmospheres. If, in London, Hazzard had lived reserved and aloof, with this particular self inhibited, in this Wiltshire cottage he had been accustomed in the old days to talk to his mother and to be talked to by her. Here his reserve had ceased. And so it was on this April day, with Ruth sitting in Mary Hazzard's chair.

He said: "It's strange to think that I used to be a little kid here, in knickers. Things sometimes happen as you make up your mind that they shall happen."

Her answer might have been inspired: "You always wanted to be a doctor?"

If this echo in her had been personal, she had given back more than an echo.

"You see, I was a rather solitary kid. I used to get bullied at school. That's apt to start you on a path of your own. But it wasn't easy."

She stirred her tea. "I know; it's quite wonderful. If your mother—could—— But of course she does know. And this year——"

He glanced at her questioningly but her head was lowered. Did she know?

"It's my critical year. There is a vacancy on the staff. I ought to get it."

Her raised eyes said, "Of course."

Hazzard went on talking. His talking to her seemed to have an inevitableness.

"Oh, nothing's certain. I have enemies. But on the whole it should be a certainty. Every decent consideration should make it a certainty. I have given five or six years' work to the Hospital—for nothing."

She echoed those words. "For nothing?"

"That's our custom and tradition. It's rather a fine tradition. It should eliminate some men and things. I have worked for my place; I have denied myself in it. Unless——"

He paused, and she watched him.

"Unless. . . . You see, it's a prejudiced world. Success doesn't

depend always on what you do but on whether the lords of the earth like you. I have to be elected by the Board of Governors. One or two of them would keep me out—if they could."

She said: "Oh, they are jealous?"

And he smiled.

"Not quite that, perhaps. I'm new wine and they are old bottles. But I have my backers. The main thing is, they have no reason for not electing me; no adequate reason; no decent reason. It should be a certainty."

She assumed it to be a certainty.

"And then—you will be paid?"

Again he smiled.

"Not a penny; the work is honorary; but I shall have the rank of a Consulting Physician. That's to say, patients may come to me; other doctors may send difficult cases to me. Fees. But it's very slow."

In her simple way, she was trying to visualize his future as it concerned him and as it might concern herself.

"Then, you won't stay at No. 7? You will have to have a house —in Harley Street?"

"Not quite a house; a room, perhaps, in that august neighbourhood. I shall keep on No. 7. It suits me. I shall have to go on coaching."

She breathed inward relief. Roper's Row was within her ken and her capacities. A vague, distinguished future rather frightened her. She might have no corner in it, no function, no justification. She wanted her great man to be great, because she loved him: but just because she loved him she wanted to be necessary—a little devoted shadow flitting about. She was amazingly unostentatious.

IV

Afterwards, they set forth and climbed Sisbury, following the steep path worn in the turf. Hazzard went without a hat; and his liking for going hatless was one of the many minor differences that made Melfont dislike him. The parson and the doctor and the squire wore hats, and the lesser heads of the village were variously covered. "I tell 'ee, he just must be different." They said that Hazzard liked to show off his forehead, or that his head was too swollen for any decent hat to fit it. Some of the youngsters called him "Winston." But, as a matter of fact, Hazzard liked his head bare in the open country and the play of the wind through his aggressive hair. It gave him a feeling of out-of-doorness and of

freedom. He was a little different from his fellows because he had some original things to think about, and liked the crowd so little that he did not trouble to be like it. Also, he had outlived his dread of the people who pulled faces; more often than not, he did not notice the faces. So he climbed Sisbury with Ruth, who wore her bunch of artificial myosotis in her hat and thought him so right that she hardly noticed the absence of his hat. After all, it was the head that mattered. But when they reached the top of the hill she also uncovered her head and let the west wind do as it pleased with her coiled hair.

"Isn't it wonderful!"

She was just a little breathless with the climb and with the tumultuous movement of the landscape. For it did seem to move under the changing sky and before the push of the wind. There were cloud shadows going up the hills and over them, and the clouds themselves were in full sail. She stood up by the grey menhir with her two hands holding her hat. She looked this way and that; her eyes appeared brighter and smaller.

"Why, the cottages look just like toys."

Hazzard, with his hands in his pockets, gazed and gazed. You could drink this Wiltshire landscape; breathe in it; feel it as motion and space. Up on Sisbury, as a boy, he had had the feeling of flying, or of hanging poised like a bird. Your heart-beats were like the pulsing of wings.

"Yes, just like toys."

His eyes sought out the little corner of the churchyard where his mother lay. She was not a sentimentalist; but some memories are buried deep—and blood is blood. If he owed anything to anybody, he owed it to the woman who had triumphed over both heredity and environment. She had given him a proof of greatness; he had been able to believe in her as he had believed in no one else; she had built and blazoned her own cross. And from that corner of Melfont his glance travelled and rested for a moment on the Prosser Farm. That sow-woman, rooting amid muck!

Again, he was conscious of Ruth leaning against the menhir and holding her black hat; and to him she was woman as his mother had been woman.

"You see our cottage?"

Of course she saw it; and he went on to tell her how he saw it as something else.

"That's my idea. There is that strip of grassland—just high enough above the river, sheltered, but catching all the sun. Even if one could build a place to take a dozen children, it would be

something. To me—healing is the work, which means finding out how to heal."

She said: "It must be the greatest work in the world."

v

Old Fanshawe was making play with his rolled gold pince-nez. In moments of emphasis, he jerked them up and down, holding them between right finger and thumb. He had his back to the high Georgian window of the Hospital Board Room and behind him the plane trees and the poplars of the Hospital quadrangle were showing their young leaves. Old Fanshawe made some people think of a brass eagle—a lectern—holding up the book of the world's wisdom.

There had been a meeting of the Hospital Governors. The meeting was over and the figures were dispersed about the big room. Twenty or more chairs were still arranged round the mahogany table. The chair of chairs had been occupied by Sir Dighton Fanshawe.

He flicked his glasses.

"Clitheroe—Clitheroe—just one moment."

The Secretary of the Hospital was bending over the book of the Minutes. He had a bald head from which a fringe of grizzled black hair seemed to be slipping, and very large eyes behind high-powered spectacles. He was a solemn person, very full of affairs. Closing the book, he moved with deliberation towards the big window, and the group in which Sir Dighton was the central figure. Sir Dighton did not like Clitheroe—for the Secretary had one of those harsh and swarthy skins that are apt to look dirty and unshaved; but Clitheroe was an admirable Secretary. He was strong in finance—an indomitable beggar. He knew how to handle an appeal to the Public.

"Oh, Clitheroe, by the way, do you happen to know whether Dr. Hazzard is married?"

Clitheroe looked at Sir Dighton and also at Mr. Tate. His responses were deliberate; he gave you the impression of moving about in slippers. "No, I don't."

"Ah! I think I am speaking for some of my colleagues when I say that I regard it as essential that this point should be made clear."

Mr. Tate agreed.

"Most essential, under the circumstances; most essential."

Two other gentlemen moved acquiescent heads.

"You had better ask Dr. Hazzard."

Clitheroe had the air of being faintly annoyed. At Board Meetings he had to be ready with the secretarial oil-can—to mollify friction and keep things moving.

"It isn't a necessary qualification, sir."

Old Fanshawe tapped with his glasses.

"Marriage?—no. But, in this particular case, it happens to be vital. It is a question of prestige—reputation. I regard it as such, for the sake of the Hospital. And I think these gentlemen agree."

Clitheroe knew which way the straws were blowing. He, too, had to cultivate the conventions. A man might be devilish clever, but it was even more necessary for him to be devilishly respectable.

"Very well. Supposing I obtain a definite statement on the point from all three candidates? Gough, I know, is married."

Sir Dighton smoothed the air.

"Don't make too much of it—not too much of it. Merely—the simple fact."

"Yes, *suaviter in modo*," thought Clitheroe, "*fortiter in re*. Sly old scoundrel! But then, in a way, he is right."

Chapter Twenty-four

I

HAZZARD, passing along the ground floor corridor of "Bennet's" on his way to the Out-Patients' Wing, met Mr. Clitheroe coming out of his office. "Oh, Dr. Hazzard—just a moment."

Clitheroe liked Hazzard. Each of them was a practical enthusiast, and under that coarse and muddy skin of his Clitheroe hid other qualities. He might be a little brusque on occasions—partly because he was a very busy man, and also a rather delicate man; and he preferred to deal with people who did not waste his time. There was a window recess opposite the door of the Secretary's office, and Clitheroe took Hazzard by the arm and persuaded him towards the window. The corridor happened to be empty.

"I have been instructed to ask you a question. It may strike you as both irrelevant and impertinent. Are you married?"

Clitheroe's eyes, big and blue and myopic behind their high-powered lenses, were fixed on Hazzard's—but they were kind eyes, for Clitheroe had watched Hazzard's career and had understood the heroism of it. He might have a muddiness of skin, but he was not a Fanshawe.

"No, I'm not married."

Hazzard was conscious of the kindness of those other eyes and of the way the question had been asked. But why such a question?

"Any esoteric meaning, Clitheroe?"

"Well—yes. There are certain sorts of fussiness and interference. I'm speaking in confidence."

He saw that Hazzard was puzzled.

"Some members of the Board are asking for this information from the candidates for election. I'm not at liberty to go into details. You couldn't arrange to come and take up residence in the College, could you?"

"No. My present place suits me very well."

And then Clitheroe was attacked by sudden shyness; his brusque, brisk manner had years of self-coercion behind it. Fundamentally, he was one of those absurdly shy men who have to will themselves into publicity. As a youngster, he had stammered; and, on occasions, he would flounder into a kind of quag of hypersensitive dumbness. He wanted to say to Hazzard: "Look here, get married.

It's no business of mine, of course. A hospital may be as full of gossip and scandal and old women as any village. And some old women are malicious. They want to catch you out on the sex question."

But Clitheroe could not blurt it out. There was a something about Hazzard that silenced him. Besides, Hazzard's election should be a certainty; he was a "Bennet's" man; Gough and Hardcastle (the other candidates) were not. And Hazzard had given years of gratuitous work to "Bennet's." Clitheroe was caught in a mumbling mood. If Hazzard had some of the terrible young brightness of the Angel of the Lord, Clitheroe was more mute than Balaam's ass. He felt himself voiceless in the face of this other man's honour.

"Oh, well, that's all right. I had to ask you the question. Take it as asked, and answered."

He escaped—feeling that the business had been uncomfortably incomplete; and Hazzard went on his way, a little puzzled but not seriously so. He had known other occasions when Clitheroe had betrayed a temperamental clumsiness. It was Clitheroe's idiosyncrasy.

Hazzard's innocence continued; he was sanguine; he expected to be elected to the vacant post and success would mean a very great deal to him. As he put it in a letter to Moorhouse: "If they elect me, it will mean that I have become 'respectable.' Wonderful word! Translated, it will allow that my work is respected. I have had so much prejudice to traverse; prejudice is natural enough. I confess to feeling prejudiced against a first-class Rugby Forward who, when he is not chasing a ball, may be as stupid as sin. Because, my dear man, however proud and purposeful one may be, one is human. Success does help. A man does not deliberately choose to be a scurvy dog. I have cultivated a kind of indifference, but I don't want my work to be treated with indifference. Professional recognition helps. It means that a great Body of Commonsense has accepted you."

He was sanguine. He knew that he had partisans on the Governing Board. Every consideration of fairness was in his favour. He was a "Bennet's" man: for some years now, he had held a post that always was considered to be a stepping-stone to a staff appointment. He could discover no adequate reason for his failing to be elected. His record was both brilliant and unblemished. He had met neither of his rivals; both belonged to other Hospitals—though he understood that Hardcastle was Sir Dighton Fanshawe's "fancy." He had heard Hardcastle described as "A fellow

with nice eyes and a fine chin—the sort of fellow who might be a peer or a shop-walker—but more probably the latter." Old Fanshawe liked a man who had pink manners and could carry a silk hat as it should be carried. Gough was a solid, assiduous fellow who wore spectacles. Studied dispassionately, the situation was Christopher Hazzard's. Almost he had come to regard the vacant post as his.

II

Ruth's confidence was as innocent as Christopher's.

It was May, and Ruth had become a gardener, especially so since that week-end at Melfont; and though her enthusiasms had to confine themselves to tubs and boxes and flower-pots, she sowed her enthusiasms lavishly. She had taken to herself the care of Hazzard's roof garden, and, having seen in a green-grocer's window a selection of gaudy seed-packets, her imagination was fired. The seed packets promised wonderful floral pyrotechnics. She bought canariensis and climbing nasturtiums, and stocks and snapdragon; sweet sultan and marigold. Her dream was a kind of floriferous bower, and she purchased two empty butter-tubs and three sugar-boxes and painted them green.

But where was the earth to come from? She had to appeal to her "great man."

"Isn't it funny? We live on the earth and yet when you want a few boxfuls of soil, in London——!"

She had inveigled Hazzard into the back-yard and shown him her tubs and boxes, and her problem was naïve and rather touching.

"I suppose we couldn't fill them here?"

The soil of the country—half-garden, half-yard—was black and sour and unfertile, and Hazzard was almost as perplexed as she was. "Yes, it's an unexpected sort of problem. Besides, a sugar-box full of soil weighs about—how much?"

She looked poignant. "Now, wasn't it silly of me not to think, before I bought the boxes?"

He had no quarrel with her innocences. In fact, his impulse was to abet and humour them, and this impulse had grown more active since their week-end at Melfont. Why shouldn't his woman-child grow flowers?

He said: "I'll see what can be done." But to find his fertile loam, Hazzard had to take a 'bus ride into the suburbs and discover a working florist who would supply him with two or three sacks of soil, and deliver it. It was a quite expensive adventure,

bringing English earth to Roper's Row. The soil was dumped in the yard, and Hazzard and Ruth spent an evening in carrying buckets full of soil up to the roof and filling the tubs and boxes—though Christopher did most of the carrying.

So Ruth had her garden and sowed her seeds, and watched and watered them with tender enthusiasm, and was grievously disappointed when some of her sowings refused to germinate. Probably she watered them too lavishly, but the canariensis and the nasturtiums and the marigolds did appear, and to fill the gaps in her conception she bought with her own money a few plants of musk and lobelia, and pansies. She spent her evenings up among the chimney-pots while Hazzard was coaching his students. She rigged up some wooden stakes and a wonderful lattice of string for her canariensis and her nasturtiums to climb upon.

In two other tubs grew the bush roses that had been taken as cuttings from Mary Hazzard's garden—one white, one red. Hazzard had pruned the bushes, using an old scalpel; and now Ruth was watching the young green shoots lengthening. She appeared to attach a sentimental and mystical significance to these roses. They were not very vigorous plants, for London smoke is London smoke; but Ruth understood that they should bloom in June, and June was to be the great month. In June, Hazzard would become a Junior Honorary Physician on the staff of "Bennet's," and his first official triumph would coincide with the blooming of Mary Hazzard's roses. That was how Ruth foresaw it.

But the roses must be in bloom! She had heard, or read in the gardening notes of a halfpenny paper, that roses need rich feeding, and her enthusiasm had so much practicability that she enlisted a small boy and sent him out with the fire shovel and an old bucket, into Red Lion Square. He returned with the plunder and was given twopence; and the roses received their oblation.

Hazzard noticed it. He was beginning to take note of all Ruth's activities; and he was absurdly and strangely touched. That there should be a tinge of pathos in a bucket of horse-droppings! Maybe, he had glimpses of the transmutations worked by the spirit of woman.

He would join Ruth on the roof when he had finished with his young men below. He was reminded of the title of a book by the great Dorset man over the border, *Two on a Tower*. In the twilight, among the chimney-pots, he would see the foliage of the poplar tree change from green to grey and from grey to black, and the lights glimmer out, and little golden clouds die away. He would be aware of this woman-thing happily busy, tucking the young

shoots of her climbers through the meshes of her web, or stirring the soil in the boxes with an old kitchen fork. He felt above the world with her; more and more he felt himself with her.

There came that evening when Ruth would say: "There are three buds on the roses."

He had to examine them, while she bent and touched the buds with the tip of a ring-finger.

"Two on the red, and one on the white."

"So there are."

She was mysterious—filled with prophetic pride.

"I want them to be in bloom on the day. It's the 15th, isn't it?"

He looked at her intent dark head.

"If we are lucky."

"Oh, no, not luck. It can't be luck. It's what you have worked for."

"So you are going to cut the roses on the 15th?"

She mused. "No, I don't think I want to cut them. I just want them to be in flower. You see, they were your mother's roses—weren't they?"

"And now they are yours."

"I'd like to feel they are."

"Well—they are."

She was mute, with a sudden trembling muteness. What had he said? And did he mean it, or mean all that she wished to be meant? She put her face close to the green leaves.

"Do you think, if it is fine on the 15th?—couldn't we have supper out of doors, up here?"

"Why not?"

"I'll get everything ready. Why, wouldn't it be almost like having a picnic on Sisbury Hill?"

He was looking at the massive shape of the poplar. When he answered her, he seemed to be answering some other voice as well as hers, "Yes, almost like Sisbury Hill."

III

Ruth was up very early on the morning of the great day. She drew back the curtains and pulled up the blind. Yes, it was fine—gloriously and blessedly fine.

She wanted to run up and look at the roses. She did run up directly she was dressed, to find three flowers open and two buds ready to unfold. She bent down and put her lips to one of the red

flowers, and then—so as not to be guilty of favouritism—kissed them all.

Oh, great day!

At breakfast, Christopher appeared to her to be extraordinarily calm; but then, of course, he had every right to be confident. Yes, he was going to the Hospital as usual, and in the afternoon he had his children's Out-Patients at Marylebone.

"When shall we know?"

He told her that the Board of Governors met at five o'clock and that the average length of a Board Meeting was about an hour. He was going to wait in the Secretary's room to hear the result. He would come straight back to No. 7.

"Will there be any class to-night?"

"No; I have put it off."

"I think it is going to keep fine, don't you?"

Hazzard thought so. She was so full of her little "festa" that he had to shine like the sun and eschew the casting of shadows. She was so devotedly sure of success, and possibly he had been subtly infected by her confidence and, after all, he ought to have nothing to fear from those other fellows.

"We ought not to count our chickens, ought we?"

But he was smiling, and she looked mysterious.

"The roses are out and I am getting everything ready."

She had worked out her menu; she had been economizing for three weeks for this one evening's dear extravagance. Everything was to be cold, save the soup. After the soup, there would be salmon mayonnaise, with strawberries and cream to follow, and cheese-straws to round off the feast. Also, there was to be wine; a bottle of red wine purchased at a real wine shop; and little red glasses, and blue-and-white paper serviettes. The dinner-table would have to be improvised. She had her eyes on the blackboard in Hazzard's class room; arranged on a couple of boxes and covered with a white cloth, it would serve.

She saw Hazzard off at a quarter to nine, following him down the passage to the street door. The sun laid a bright finger along the length of Roper's Row and touched the green tops of the trees in Red Lion Square.

"You'll be back about half-past six?"

"Yes, about then."

She watched him go and then closed the door, and went happily to her work.

Hazzard walked down to Red Lion Street. It was in the shadow, but he could see the trees and the buildings of the Foundling

Hospital massed in the sunlight and it occurred to him to think how often he had seen those trees and that façade in all sorts of weathers and in every variety of mood. There had been times when he had felt like a little shivering boy; and days when he had been grim. He had seen snow lying in the great open space behind the high iron railings. But to-day, the sun was shining and the vans rumbled triumphantly over the cobbles of Guilford Place; and yet he was conscious of a little whimper of disquietude. His bowels yearned. He felt rather as he had felt before an examination—excited but confident, and yet not too confident. This affair was not quite the same. An examination was a door that you opened for yourself with the key of your skill and your knowledge; whereas the key of this door remained in other hands. Your mastership might matter to a point, but it could not command the key. It was one of those occasions when you were at the mercy of other men.

He walked up Guilford Street. How often he had walked up Guilford Street! Yes, as Squit Hazzard; as Hazzard with F.R.C.S., and F.R.C.P., attached to his label; as Dr. Hazzard. And how would he return down Guilford Street? Surely they could not deny him the honour that was his after all these years of gratuitous work? Granted that there were prejudices—dislikes? Yes, but his election should be inevitable.

Crossing the forecourt of "Bennet's," he looked up at the familiar face of the clock. Time. To-day those hands should record a passing and an arriving. He would be received into the inner sanctuary of "Bennet's," accepted, recognized!

He went to his little room and hung up his hat. He glanced at the familiar ledgers. After to-day, it might not be his. Some other aspirant would follow in, stepping into the niche that would be left empty because of his ascent.

Someone opened the door. Hazzard saw Clitheroe's spectacles and round brusque head.

"Oh, by the way, I wanted to ask you——"

Clitheroe stood there awkwardly; his eyes stared.

"The Board meets at five; I suppose there is nothing you want to tell me?"

Hazzard had one of his ledgers in his hands. There was something funny about Clitheroe; but then Clitheroe had his funny moods. He looked worried.

"No. I suppose we shall know the result about six?"

"Yes, probably."

"Can I wait in your office?"

"Or—here—if you like. I'll come and tell you the result." Almost Clitheroe had reverted to stammers.

"Of course, my dear chap, you know—that I'm wanting you to be the man. That's obvious."

He made a hurried disappearance, leaving Hazzard vaguely uneasy. Surely Clitheroe had no doubts? And yet Clitheroe had infected him with a feeling of uncertainty. And why this air of discomfort and of apology? But then, Clitheroe was a moody creature who sometimes offended people—and very important people—by behaving like an irritable ape. He suffered from dyspepsia. So Hazzard went quietly through the day's work as though the day were as ordinary as hundreds of other days had been, and would be. He lunched at a Lyons' tea-shop in Oxford Street. He was not hungry. He ate a sandwich and drank a cup of coffee. Ruth's dinner had to be remembered. Poor little Ruth! She seemed to take the thing very seriously. Some women did take things very seriously. But she was unusual; she gave so much.

The afternoon was one of his afternoons at Marylebone. It was work that he loved—absorbing and selfless—and he forgot his suspense in that little world of sick children and worried mothers. The business was so very real; you could not burke it, or be casual, or fool yourself that you knew when you did not know. Children looked you in the eyes. You had to give the best that was in you, or feel that you had failed them.

And worried women asked questions.

"Doctor, is there anything more we can do?"

So often he would have to answer, "Nothing"; and to make such a confession was to be urged towards divine discontent. It was a question of knowing more; searching out more secrets; slowly and devotedly turning the nothing into something. Man's work.

He came away from his children feeling chastened and calmed. The Out-Patient Sister had given him tea, and prophetic congratulations. "Of course, we think it a certainty. It must be." She knew her Christopher Hazzard. He walked back to "Bennet's" and, going to his little room, sat down to wait. It was half-past five. He felt confident.

Three-quarters of an hour passed. He had just glanced at his watch and had put it away, when he heard footsteps on the stone flags of the corridor. The door opened and Clitheroe looked in, and, seeing Hazzard, seated in his chair, seemed to wish to forget that Hazzard was visible. Clitheroe's face had a sombreness—an expression of sallow scorn. He came in and closed the door, and somehow Hazzard seemed to know.

"They have elected Hardcastle."

He blurted the words out. He was on edge, spontaneous man, ceasing to be official.

"Damned humbugs; I'm sorry. I ought to have warned you but I didn't think they could be quite such humbugs."

IV

There was a stillness about Hazzard's figure. He continued to look at Clitheroe as though Clitheroe's outburst of unofficial naturalness had surprised him more than Clitheroe's news had done. But his stillness was the stillness of shock. He had that feeling of inward dissolution as though his vitals had turned to pulp. He was conscious of feeling cold.

He said: "Hardcastle—oh, all right. But what were their reasons? Had they any reasons?"

He was aware of Clitheroe's blue eyes very big behind their lenses. Clitheroe's outburst continued: "Oh, yes, reasons! A secretary is not supposed to divulge confidences. Well, I ought to have warned you. You see, there has been gossip."

"Gossip? But about what?"

"You are not married, Hazzard, and apparently—it has got about—that—you have someone living with you."

Hazzard's eyes gave a sudden flash. It was the gleam of a swift comprehension. "Good God!"

His voice was sharp with scorn. "You mean to say? Yes—I have a girl who keeps house for me. But there's nothing——"

He became inarticulate; he stood up. He felt himself in contact with that smothering, substanceless thing—Calumny—a sort of slime that clings to a man and will not be put off. Even in the full heat of his anger, he was aware of a kind of helplessness. Clitheroe was polishing his spectacles.

"Sex, you know," he said; "old fellows pretending to hold their noses. Professional responsibility. Of course, I regard a man's private affairs——"

He hunched his shoulders.

"But there it is. A sort of atmosphere is produced. Someone can get up and say: 'I'm not a prudish person, but I do insist upon official ascepticism. We—Governors—have responsibilities.' You see, that's how it happened. It was put about."

Hazzard was very white.

"That I was living with a woman?"

And Clitheroe nodded.

There was silence—a silence of supreme tension and discomfort. Clitheroe was readjusting his spectacles. He felt sore and upset. He was wondering what Hazzard would do; what he could do. And Hazzard was standing there in a white glare of realization, with his heart-beats hardening and his consciousness cold as ice.

"Well, that's final."

"Final?"

"Obviously. Do you think that I am going to appeal or protest? I'll come to your office, Clitheroe, and write my letter."

Clitheroe looked at him questioningly.

"You mean, to resign?"

"I do—and be damned to them. They can find another Medical Registrar to-morrow. Everything is in order."

He threw a bunch of keys on the table.

"You may as well take these. You won't see me here again. You will never see me inside 'Bennet's' again."

Clitheroe appeared to make an effort to say something. He did say something.

"But, I must tell you, no reasons were to be given. *Sub rosa*, I mean—there was to be no public statement as to why."

"Of course. They just held their noses and elected Hardcastle."

And suddenly he thought of Ruth and her flowers, and a kind of twisted, ironical smile showed on his face.

"Yes, I'm so utterly innocent, Clitheroe—that's the funny part of it. I'll come and write that letter."

V

Ruth had just finished laying her table on the "leads" of No. 7. The sky was a great blue bowl covering roofs and chimney-pots and the green tops of the trees, but even so perfect an evening had its blemishes. Smuts would descend through the still air, and Ruth had to cover her preparations with a cloth.

She was flushed. She went down to fetch two chairs and was half-way up the first flight with one of them when she heard Hazzard's key in the door. She left the chair on the stairs. She met him in the passage, and with such confidence that she was like an innocent mirror waiting to reflect his triumph.

"Well——?"

And then she saw his face. It was starkly serious even when it smiled at her. She felt herself being looked at in a way that was new to her.

"Everything ready?"

"Yes. But—you've heard——? It's——?"

He turned to hang up his hat. He had been thinking of Ruth as he had never thought of her before, not as the innocent cause of his humiliation, but as a child involved with him in this foul stroke of fortune. He had felt for her a sudden, poignant tenderness. He had known that he would have to tell her, but that no power on earth would ever make him tell her how and why the thing had happened.

He said gently:

"We counted our chickens—too confidently. One of the other men was chosen. Still, there is no reason why we shouldn't celebrate."

He was aware of her face going dim like a lamp that has been extinguished. She did not utter a word. She seemed to sink against the wall, an obscure little figure in the dark passage. Her hands hung limply. And then he realized that she was in tears, and the very stillness of her weeping made it more grievously poignant.

He was shocked—shocked into being what he had never been before,—man to her woman.

"Ruth."

She could say nothing. She just put out a hand.

"Oh, my dear, you mustn't take it so to heart."

She gave him one wet and tragic look. She seemed to droop. And then he was holding her, and her weeping became articulate. She trembled; she was shaken.

"I—I—can't believe it."

He held her, and ceased to be astonished at himself. She was a limp, warm, wet thing in his arms. He was aware of her as a scented softness, a poignancy, woman. She had been using some perfume, and it became in that moment of their mutual anguish and exultation a sweet sad scent,—like the smell of roses in autumn.

"Oh, my dear, you mustn't take it—like this."

Her head was against his cheek.

"I can't believe it.—It can't have been fair."

He looked at her dark head. He was aware of other dawns in the cloud of its darkness. She was Ruth. She was something more than the ruthlessness of man. He raised her face gently, his fingers under her chin.

"Let's go up to the flowers. It's a great day—with a difference. I've been shown things."

And he kissed her.

Chapter Twenty-five

I

To Ruth Avery Hazzard was still her great man, but he was great with a difference.

He was hers, wonderfully and unexpectedly hers, and he was to be hers for ever and ever.

Something had happened to them both. On that evening when he had cut one of the roses and had given it to her as though he were offering her a flower of symbolism he had become her lover, but no ordinary lover. He had appeared so gentle and serious and deliberate; not hungry, hurrying man, but something so much more than that. She had felt overshadowed by the protective purposefulness of him.

"Ruth, I want you to marry me."

She could not quite understand how everything had happened, but did one understand how such things happened? She had just put her hand into his.

"If you want it."

But he made her marvel. He was curiously calm, and the quality of his calmness puzzled her. She saw him as a man who had been bitterly foiled and disappointed, and yet he would say nothing. He had an air of having closed a book; his very calmness had a finality; almost he suggested the atmosphere of a holiday, of a pause in life's purpose, and a new attitude towards the future. He had shut something up in a cupboard.

On the morning afterwards he got up from the breakfast-table and kissed her.

"Can I help you?"

"Help?"

Her eyes were wide.

"But aren't you——?"

"I'm not going to the Hospital any more."

And then her serious and almost frightened face seemed to move him to a protective playfulness.

"I won't get in your way. I have plenty to do in the lab. But if I can give you a hand—first."

Her eyes swam. She began to clear away the breakfast-things. Somehow she was realizing the immense significance of the

change. It was a cataclysm, a revolution. His beloved hospital, his work, his career! What did it mean?

She said, "But you are not giving up 'Bennet's' for good?"

"Yes. I have finished there. It's a question of pride."

He spoke calmly, with none of the self-pity of the man out to provoke partisanship or compassion. His bitterness was sealed up in ice.

She looked tragic.

"Oh, but think what it means. I can't believe. You mustn't."

She was holding the bread trencher, and he crossed over and put his arm round her.

"It's inevitable. I gave them everything I had in me, and they have turned me down. It's final. I resigned the registrarship last night."

"It hurts me. It's so horribly unfair, to choose another man, an outsider——"

"My dear, he dresses well," and she caught the vibration of bitterness and was wounded by it. His wounds were hers.

"Hateful. But you won't give up the children?"

"No, I shall stick to Marylebone."

"And the students?"

"We live on the students. And I have an idea, Ruth, that I shall put up a plate and practise."

"Here?"

"In the neighbourhood. I'm just thinking things out."

She was silent for a moment. Then she put her cheek against his shoulder.

"I'll help. You've been so wonderful to me."

"Oh, no; I'm learning."

"I want to go on just as before, doing things."

She could not see the look he gave her. Yes, he was learning things.

"Do you?"

"Oh, of course."

"But I work you rather hard."

"Hard——! Why, I've never been so happy. I love it all."

"But a doctor's wife doesn't cook and make beds."

"I—shall. We shall have to be careful, shan't we?"

"Yes, rather careful."

"I'm glad. Oh, I'll be so careful. I shall love it. Because, oh, you know, my dearest——"

Very gently he put his lips to her hair.

"I've been a blind sort of idiot, Ruthie, but I'm beginning to

see things. I've been too academic, too much apart. You are teaching me all sorts of things."

"I?"

"Yes, you. Just as my children have taught me. We are going forward together. You need not be afraid."

She turned her face to look up at him.

"How could I be afraid? There is no one else in the world like you."

II

Hazzard's exodus intrigued "Bennet's" for a day or two, but no hearts were broken. He had made a little splash, but the water closed quickly over the event, and the ripple marks died away. Two or three of the younger members of the staff wrote to him; one of them came to see him.

"We are feeling rather sore over this affair. There are some of us who would like to see you stay on."

But Hazzard was inflexible, and his place was filled, for in these crowded days the queue closes up eagerly when one small human speck is squeezed out. Though—in a way—Hazzard's resignation was a protest against crowd coercion, and an assertion of individual dignity. His temperament refused subservience. He could not protest as the herd protests, in an anonymous merged mass organized for passive obstruction. His strike was personal, a mere individual gesture. In a sense he had been crucified, but no one raises a head to look at solitary crosses. Unless men howl in their thousands the raw meat remains outside the cage.

Certain of the wise old Agags sniggered. They had excluded from their social scheme a certain particle of foreign matter, an irritant, an obtrusive bug. They had effaced the outsider. Also they could feel justified. For Hazzard had made no public protest. They could regard his resignation as a mere face-saving gesture, a display of peevishness or as a piece of bluff.

To them it was a confession of culpability. They had caught him out on the sex question, and he had had to leave the wicket. "How's that?" The umpire had no doubts.

Sir Dighton did not throw the ball in the air, but he looked civic and sagacious and debonair. He left the tossing of balls to gentlemen like Mr. Tate.

"Caught in the slips, sir."

Old Fanshawe was sententious.

"Sometimes it is necessary to administer a purge. One has to stand for professional chastity. *Uberrima fides*."

He liked to round things off with a Latin quotation or an epitaph.

III

Meanwhile, Hazzard climbed Sisbury; not the actual hill, but a hill of consciousness from which he could look out upon a changed landscape. Adaptations, though his point of view and his purpose remained the same. Also, life had been doubled, and his feeling about things had changed, because emotion had come to colour his consciousness.

He did not squeal. Had he been even less than the man he was he would not have whimpered to his woman, for his woman was still a child, a creature who moved him to indefinable and incalculable tenderness. Somehow she seemed to have wept herself into his heart, perhaps because her tears had not been selfish tears, but touchingly spontaneous. Where a lesser man might have felt bitter Hazzard discovered compassion.

He could have said, "The woman tempted me."

But she had not tempted him, and instead of feeling bitter towards her he saw her as a gentle and rather helpless creature involved with him in the same undeserved shipwreck. She shivered beside him on the raft, and his arm went round her and his impulse was to draw her close and give her warmth. Poor little Ruth, but not so poor as she had been, for perhaps he was divining in her that richness of devotion which is cloth of velvet and of gold.

Also, she had a courage and a purpose of her own. She advanced wide-eyed upon her own particular problems. She could match his problems with her understanding. She was simply wise, her inspiration obvious. She had to help her man as a woman can help her man in a dozen ways, quietly, patiently, lovingly, not by self-assertion and with studied cleverness, but by feeling with him and for him, by service. Base slavery! And men take such things for granted. But do they? Hazzard did not. His inward eyes had been opened.

For he found in Ruth a sweet practical wisdom.

"We have got to be careful."

She was there—on the roof garden—to discuss ways and means with him as the housewife and a little woman of the working world.

"I can have a woman in just two mornings a week."

"I won't have you a drudge."

"Drudge—indeed!"

Her soft mouth was almost laughing.

'Is it drudgery to do the things one loves—for somebody? Oh, Kit, it makes me happy."

He was strangely thrilled at hearing her call him "Kit." Nothing diminutive was suggested. It was just the intimate, little tender touch. Because—too—she enveloped him in an atmosphere that was not mere flattery. She did think him wonderful; she was to think of him as being still more wonderful. And he—oh, well, he would be down on the knees of a man's wonder and compassion.

"I suppose you will keep on teaching?"

"Yes. But it's possible—that the teaching may run away from us."

"But—why?"

He was very guarded.

"I'm what is called—unattached. Terrible word. I'm not a Mason. I don't belong—now—to any particular sacrosanct body."

"But then—you teach so well. Didn't nearly all your men get through their exams. last time?"

"That's true."

"Results tell."

She looked wise and triumphant.

"It isn't only 'Bennet's.' You get students from other hospitals."

"At present."

She was not completely wise as to the situation, and he was determined that she should not be wise. That indeed would be a wounding, a tragedy.

"I think I shall put up a plate."

"Here?"

"Yes, and perhaps—in a street like Guilford Street I could rent a consulting-room. And of course I shall carry on with my children."

She nodded.

"And your researches. You want to find things out. Oh, I know. I'm so sure that it will all come right. It must do. People will find out."

He smiled over her confidence, but with a kind of humility, and went on to speak of the one most intimate thing.

"We'll fix it for next month, Ruth. Shall we go to a church—or to the Registrar's?"

Her answer was inevitable.

"I'd like it to be in a church."

"It shall be. Some women should be married in churches." He understood the soul of her sacrament.

IV

It was to be one of Hazzard's sayings that "you should be able to treat most men with sweet reasonableness, smile at boys, but louts should be shouted at." Somehow, he himself had missed that most ugly of periods, the spotty season when lower lips hang wet and pendulous, and the sex face of youth is either sullen or arrogant. And as he matured and observed life with the intimate eyes of the physician it seemed to him that a great part of humanity's ugliness was due to loutishness or sluttishness. Some people never emerge from the sex slime—that larval stage—to the beauty of winged love.

Moreover, loutishness is almost universal. It is a better-washed, better-disciplined product in the public schoolboy. Its laughter is less strident; it does not loaf under lamp-posts concocting filth. Yet, to Hazzard as the teacher of middle-class youth, this same loutishness had emphasized itself in other ways. Always he had feared it a little as a sensitive nature shrinks from things blatant and stupid, and despising his own fear he showed a certain fierceness to most young men. He did not like them, or he did not like them at that particular period when like young wine they are apt to be raw and cheap. He did not unbend. He kept a sharp tongue. He insisted on frankness.

"It is no use your coming to me, Smith, if you are going to play the fool."

Yet, while knowing in theory the particular sort of young man who came to him to be coached, Hazzard had remained too much of the theorist, though he must have suspected and did suspect that the presence of Ruth in the house had been known to these youngsters. Through them the perverted tale must have travelled to headquarters. And yet the whole affair was so loathsome to him that he repressed all speculation. He asked Ruth no questions, not even the most guarded of questions.

But he took care to keep class room and house apart. He made it his habit to be waiting for youth when it arrived, so that youth could not digress, and was constrained to sit down in a chair and get out its notebook. His class had not fallen away. Even young Tate continued to attend it. But there was a part of Hazzard that hated these young faces; he had had to twist his courage into a knot; he knew that they knew, and that behind those decorous

faces were quizzings and smirkings. Nothing was thrown, and yet —on the first evening he had taken the class after his resignation, he had felt himself being pelted with invisible eggs. He had kept his head and his authority, he had made himself appear casual, cheerfully unconcerned.

At the end of a week he had run himself into his second wind. He could look steadily at each individual face without seeing it as a mask hiding a young and critical curiosity. He became again the manipulator of the rather sluggish machinery of these young men's minds.

V

This was how it happened.

One evening Hazzard was late; a sick child had kept him, a desperate case. Ruth was in the kitchen. She had unlocked the street door so that the members of the class could make their way in. She had left the kitchen door ajar so that she could listen for Hazzard's return while she got supper ready.

She heard the street door open. Two or three of the youngsters had arrived. They hung up their hats and went into the class room. Others followed. She heard the burble of their voices, an argumentative chorus. She wondered what they were arguing about.

Then she heard Hazzard's name mentioned, followed by a little high-pitched laugh. She was fatally enticed. She opened the kitchen door and stood in the passage.

"It's as simple as pie," said a voice. "You can take it from me they chucked him—because——"

"Stand up, my lad. Well—why?"

"Because he keeps that little tart here. Stinking fish, you fellows. Supposed to be his housekeeper."

"Fudge—I don't believe——"

"But it's fact. I happen to know. They wouldn't overlook his dirty linen. But it's so damned funny that old Blizzard—of all men —should have been caught out—over a girl."

There was a stillness about Ruth's listening figure. She seemed to shrink against the wall, and to recoil slowly like a retreating shadow. She re-entered the kitchen and closed the door with an air of dumb and guilty secrecy. She stood staring at nothing. Her face had a look of wounded and fatal bewilderment. She could still hear voices, but they seemed a long way off. Someone laughed. Could there be such a thing as laughter?

Then she seemed to stiffen, and to glance fearfully over her shoulder. Hazzard had returned. She heard his familiar footsteps in the passage. He came to the kitchen door and opened it.

"Sorry I'm late. Bad case. I shall have to go out again after supper."

He saw only her mute back. She was pretending to be busy with something on the table.

"Supper at eight?"

She kept her voice steady.

"Make it a quarter past eight."

He closed the door and went to his young men.

Dully she set about doing things, things that did not need doing, but she was turning a wheel. She felt stricken, filled to the lips with a kind of silence, while somewhere a voice that was hers and yet not hers cried out in anguish. "It can't be true. Oh, how could they! It can't be true." But it was true. She knew that it was true. And he had not told her. But what generosity, what greatness! Her man—— She knelt down suddenly and let arms and head rest on the table. A little shiver seemed to pass through her.

Minutes passed. She could hear Hazzard's voice, faint yet familiar. It seemed at a great distance. She struggled up, and straightened her throat, and smoothed her bosom with her hands. Her eyes had a purpose; they were afraid yet inspired. She uttered just one little, wounded cry.

"Oh, my man!"

When the students had gone she heard Hazzard hurry upstairs to wash. She was calm now with a tragic, fatal calmness. She had everything ready. They sat down. He had the air of a man hurried and absorbed in some other little human crisis, and she did not come between him and his problem. She served, and there was silence. He did not appear to notice her silence, or her fatal, sacrificial calm.

He hurried through the meal.

"I shall be back by ten. A case I want to pull through if possible —a little kid fighting for breath."

She bent her head.

"Poor little thing."

She was on the edge of helpless tears. She was glad yet rent when he got up to go. She put up a mute, veiled face.

"Kiss me, Kit."

He kissed her and hurried off.

VI

It was about ten o'clock when Hazzard returned. He felt tired but satisfied, for he had found the child better, and its breathing less smothered, and with the look of fear gone from its eyes. The passage was in darkness, and he struck a match and lit the gas. He supposed that Ruth had gone to bed, and after looking into the kitchen and finding it dark and empty, he turned out the gas and groped his way up the stairs.

He was within three steps of the landing when he paused, puzzled by a smell of gas. It was faint but definite. On the landing he thought it safe to strike a match, and shielding the little flame with his hand, he moved towards Ruth's door.

"Ruth, are you asleep?"

There was no answer, and at that moment the match began to burn his fingers, and he blew it out and struck another. He was facing Ruth's door, and standing within five feet of it, and he saw something white pinned to the door. He raised the match and read the words scribbled on a half-sheet of note-paper:

"Forgive me. I did not know till to-night that it was my fault.
"RUTH."

The match flame went out, and in the darkness he flung himself against the door, suddenly and horribly wise as to the silence and the smell of gas. She was in there dead or dying. The door was locked, but the locks on the doors of No. 7 Roper's Row were mercifully old and decrepit. He heaved with his shoulder against the wood, it trembled but held, and he drew back and charged it and felt it start back before him. There was darkness and a reek of gas. With breath held, he groped, but with fierce purposefulness. Where would she be? On the bed? And then his hands touched her. He gathered her up, and blundering with her out of that fatal room, carried her across the landing to his own room. He laid her on the bed with her head towards the foot, threw the sashes wide, and rushing back across the landing, closed the door.

The gas-jet could wait. He threw off his coat as he re-entered his room. He dragged the bed close to the window. She was lying there relaxed and comatose, her face showing a dusky pallor in the light that diffused itself from Roper's Row. He caught at a hand and felt for the pulse at the wrist. There was a faint fluttering beat.

He was like one possessed, knowledge furiously expressed in action. He tore her blouse open at the throat, rent it down, unclipped

the steel fastenings of her corsets. His hands gripped her forearms above the wrists, and standing behind her, he began those steady rhythmic movements that would draw the clean night air into her lungs.

VII

He paused. He bent over her, letting her arms lie relaxed upon the bed; his ear was close to her mouth. He heard a faint sighing, and a little movement of air played upon his skin. Thank God—she was breathing again. He had caught her back from the very edge of the unknown.

For some moments he bent over her, listening to that little sound, ready to resume artificial respiration should her breathing cease. But it did not cease, and with his hand laid gently on her bosom he could feel the rise and fall of it. O blessed life, O mystery of breathing! And he was suddenly conscious of exultation and a great tiredness. He had come to shore with her through dark waters, and with every stroke of his arms strength of loving had spent itself as well as strength of body.

But there was that open gas-jet. He went out on to the landing and stood still. Now, where exactly was the bracket? Yes, he remembered that there were two brackets, one on either side of the chimney breast. He opened the door, and holding his breath, groped his way to the two brackets and turned off the taps. He came out again to breathe, and then went in and threw open the window. Probably she had stuffed something into the throat of the chimney, but that something could wait.

He closed the door. He wanted her to wake in the fresh air, and not with the reek of gas in her nostrils. That memory would have to be effaced. And that piece of paper? It had fallen and was lying on the threshold and he bent down and picked it up and slipped it into his pocket.

"Forgive me. I did not know till to-night that it was my fault."

Poor child, poor little Ruth, beloved one! Did it matter how she had come to know? An exultation of tenderness possessed him. He re-entered the room, and bent down over her, and in the dim, diffused light he saw her eyes open and awake. They seemed to him to be very frightened eyes.

Very softly he put his lips to hers.

"My darling, don't be afraid."

She raised one of her hands and touched his hair.

"Oh—Kit—I feel.—Where am I?"

"With me. Where you will always be."

And then she remembered. She uttered a little cry.

"Oh—the gas—I meant—I wanted—Oh, my dearest——"

Sitting on the side of the bed he held her face gently between his hands.

"Lie still. Just lie still and think how I want you. There is nothing I shall want in this world as I want you."

Chapter Twenty-six

I

HAZZARD closed the door of No. 99 Guilford Place. It was a November evening and foggy, and the clouded lights were as yellow as jaundiced faces, for the fog was one of those bilious affairs that made the eyes smart and the throat feel raw.

No. 99 possessed a broad stone platform between areas and iron railings with one step rising to the black front door, and another step descending to the pavement. Hazzard paused upon this platform. His shoulders looked a little hunched and prominent and his face thin. He stood there rather like a man on the edge of dark and unfamiliar waters before making a plunge, as though he found the night sinister and cold, and sensed clammy, groping presences that touched the inward "I" of him and made it shiver and recoil.

For London befogged roused fear in Christopher Hazzard. Fog and fear! There was a quality in the yellow, muffled stillness that suggested the stealing upon you of a malignant spirit, a something that glided on soundless feet and cut the throat of a man's hope. The great city appeared so vast and chilly and obscure. It was chaos, impersonal and remorseless, a tangle of blind streets that led everywhere and nowhere. Faces came on you out of the fog like the faces of dead people, dim and pale, masks in white wax. The lights of passing vehicles and cars loomed sudden and huge, and vanished with a diffused glare behind the yellow curtain. Nothing seemed quite real but your little shivering self and its apprehensions and perplexities. You saw your fellow-men as moving shadows, shapeless things that somehow had the swollen look of dead bodies buoyed up and carried along by the gases of putrefaction.

Hazzard went out into the fog. He had seen the last of his evening patients in the consulting-room that he rented at No. 99. He had a case to visit before he returned to his wife. London smelt like sour soil thrown up out of a grave. The yellow curtain concealed everything, and became like a background upon which consciousness projected a ragged, tremulous copy of itself.

Fear! Why was a man afraid, and of what? But on a November night such as this a whole family of fears pattered along beside

you, and tweaked your coat-tails and whispered. Even the voice of your fear was a little hoarse with the fog.

These absurd, human qualms! For, since his marriage Hazzard had discovered fear, a sort of primeval uneasiness, primitive man's dread of the unknown.

On such a night he was afraid of being ill, or of Ruth being ill.

He was afraid of not being able to pay his insurance premium, two hundred pounds a year, two hundred solid, sacrificial sovereigns.

He was worried about his hat. He wore a top-hat now, and some idiot had knocked it off a hall table, and left a great ruffled patch. Hats were precious and expensive, and their glossiness essential.

He remembered that the cuffs of his shirts were becoming frayed.

A patient who owed him a three months' account had defaulted.

The kitchen range at No. 7 Roper's Row was worn out, and at breakfast he had received the builder's estimate for removing it and inserting a new one.

He was afraid of catching influenza. He had developed it in the midst of the winter rush last year, and he had lost patients and money.

His boots needed resoling again. If someone would only endow shoe leather with immortality!

Strange fog of fear, felt because he was mortal man and married, and felt not for himself but for that other. In the old, solitary days he had been immune from such hauntings. He had been responsible for no one but himself. He had not thought of Christopher Hazzard as a potential coward, and yet it was not cowardice, but love—alert and fierce-eyed—in the wilderness. Extraordinary sublimation of self! And yet there was man in him which knew that he would not have it otherwise. You suffered and consented. It was life conscious of itself as a live, inevitable urge, most vulnerable when most alive, fearful even when most fearless. For his fear was inward, hidden. It was a creature that gnawed under the cloak. The world saw a serious and rather silent little man with intent and steady eyes, abruptly kind, going about his work as though he would go on doing it for ever.

Hazzard arrived in Russell Square. Lights loomed and floated like will-o'-the-wisps. The plane-trees groping upwards through the yellowness suggested to him the branching of nerve fibrils in the substance of the brain. He turned to the right along a hoard-

ing which shut in the lower stories of a new hotel, a vast, gaunt bulk in the making, Imperial, a shell of walls and girders. A timber platform supporting a crane towered above the building, and sometimes Hazzard would pause and watch the machine at work, seeing in it something symbolical, a soulless mechanical Titan that let down a great steel tentacle and picked something up and whirled it aloft. It suggested fate, London, snatching up some little fellow and hauling him skywards to be embedded in that vast, impersonal structure. To-night the crane was lost in the fog, but Hazzard could visualize its steel tentacle dangling up there, and ready to shoot down and snatch him up out of a kind of yellow pit.

He shivered slightly and walked on. A part of the roadway of the square was under repair and closed off by poles and trestles. Red lights marked this barricade, and in front of a wooden sentry-box a brazier glowed like a blur of redness in the heart of an opal. The night-watchman sat in the box with his knees close to the brazier.

Hazzard stopped and spoke to the man. He had spoken to him on previous evenings, but on this foggy night he was attracted towards the brazier of charcoal and to the sitting figure. His courage felt cold and was moved to warm itself.

"That fire of yours looks cheerful."

The watchman removed a short clay pipe from between his teeth. He was an old man. His reactions were slow and simple. The common people easily speak to each other; it is not surprising; they have so much in common; but it was unusual for a gent in a top-hat to stop and speak to a strange workman.

"I've known it worse."

He was referring to the fog, and Hazzard, feeling the warmth from the brazier, watched a little wreath of smoke drifting from the bowl of the man's pipe. Clay pipes produce cancer of the lip. But then this old fellow probably knew nothing of cancer and its possible causes, and therefore was not troubled. Possibly, a man might see too far and too much. Or was worry the fate of those who searched too sedulously for cause and effect? That final serenity, whence did it emanate; did it exist?

"Do you stay here all night?"

"That's my job."

His bearded face was in the shadow of the box, and he looked up at Hazzard rather like an old dog in a kennel. What did the gent want? He had stopped on other evenings and had dropped a few desultory words. That was not the custom of gentlemen in top-

hats. They were not spontaneously sociable. They passed in profile, aloof, solemn silhouettes, intent upon silk-hat affairs.

He did wonder what Hazzard's job could be, and Hazzard, as though receiving some telephone message, told him.

"I'm a doctor."

So that was it.

"Don't have much to do with doctors, sir."

"You're lucky. You keep a pretty big window open. That hotel is going to be a big place."

"Biggest in London—so they say. Don't hold with such places, sir."

"Oh! Why?"

Like many workers the watchman had queer, spatial views of his own.

"A building ought to be flat. It oughtn't t' go up and shut off the sunlight, sir. If I 'ad my way I'd say 'Build 'em flat, build 'em flat.'"

Hazzard smiled.

"You're quite right. But what about ground-rents?"

"Ah,—there you are, sir. But I'd have 'em built flat. They cut up too much of the sky—they do."

He sucked at his pipe, and his patched knees warmed themselves. Hazzard noticed that the patches were very neat. He supposed that the watchman had a careful wife at home.

"Well, perhaps some day we shall build things flat. Spread out —you know. Good night."

"Good night to you, sir."

II

Hazzard slipped the latch-key into the lock of No. 7.

The door of No. 7 Roper's Row had opened and closed on him now for some fifteen years. It was the most familiar of doors, appearing occasionally in a coat of new brown paint. It carried a brass plate: "Dr. Hazzard. Surgery. Hours 9–10 and 6–7."

Since his marriage the opening of the door of No. 7 had become a more conscious act. Previously it had been like lifting the lid of a box which contained a number of familiar possessions, but now the box had enlarged itself and was full of little compartments and other inwardnesses. No. 7 was both itself and someone else. It both welcomed and warmed him, but also it propounded to him some question that was never asked and never answered. It was woman.

Hazzard would wonder at the unexpected way in which life reacted upon him. Always he returned to No. 7 with a feeling that

he might discover the unexpected, though the unexpected veiled itself. He knew exactly how and where he would find his wife. She would be sitting in a basket-chair by the kitchen fire; they sat in the kitchen to save coal; she would have her basket on the table beside her. She would look at him with those dark, placid, faithful eyes, and get up and kiss him. She did not kiss him too often.

No. 7 had such quietude. It was like a slip of silence inserted into the human hubbub of Roper's Row, and Hazzard closed the door on the yellow fog, and his yellow mood remained in the street. No. 7 was warm and intimate and secure, and somehow his worries hid themselves when he shut the door on the world. Not that worry ceased; it became—so to speak—a part of No. 7's atmosphere, sublimated into tenderness, merging into a background of pathos.

Hazzard entered the surgery and turned up the gas. Mrs. Bunce's shop had ceased to be a lecture room and had become surgery and dispensary. Hazzard's work as a coach had dwindled gradually, partly because he had ceased to take students from "Bennet's," and at the end of a year coaching had not been worth while. Standing at a high desk he jotted down two or three notes and prescriptions in his day-book, and made the usual entries in his ledger. He was hungry, and after supper he had some dispensing to do.

Turning down the gas he remembered the injury to his silk-hat, and taking it from the peg, he passed down the passage to the kitchen.

Ruth was there, sitting by the fire, darning socks, the very soul of domestic dullness. She never came fussing out to meet him. She waited. She looked up at him with tranquil, dark eyes, for to Hazzard her eyes appeared eternally tranquil. He knew no more than any average husband knows, how much went on behind those eyes. Domestic dullness. As though in such still waters no life moved, whereas more happens in a married woman's life. Happenings which matter. The histrionic *dame aux camelias* lets off emotional fireworks. She may not quite know what she is at and why. The woman who, with an air of placidity, sits and watches and waits, has very much a plan. Her life is a stream of adventure, but her adventures are spiritual.

Ruth put her work aside and rose from her chair. She was plumper, more mature. She moved easily, with a pleasant deliberation, and with no appearance of hurry.

"Finished, dear?"

"Not quite."

Always she looked at Hazzard when he returned to her as

though she were looking at a man perennially new. He was hers and the same and yet not the same. In a sense he was her eternal problem, and he was as unaware of it as he was unaware of her watchful, secret self. Always to him she appeared so restfully apt, so instant in her response to the practical.

She kissed him and took his hat.

"Did you drop it?"

"Some idiot knocked it off a table."

She did not say, "Hats should not be on tables." So often it is the assertively intellectual people who propound the obvious. Love understands and refrains.

She said, "I'll heat an iron after supper. You haven't to go out again, have you?"

"No. A few bottles to make up."

"I can do it."

He patted her shoulder.

"Oh, no, you won't. Now, what about some supper?"

She did not say that supper was ready; it was ready; it was always ready; and she put his hat aside on the dresser, and seemed to smile at something like a woman who smiles over hidden secure treasure. Each evening she sensed his coming back to her. She liked to sense it afresh in that particular way. She had not the habit of mind that takes life as it takes a plate of porridge, which—perhaps—was her supreme virtue.

III

They were half-way through supper when the front door bell rang, and Ruth, with a glance at her husband, rose to answer it.

But he forestalled her. He was nearer the door.

"No, I'll go."

Leaving the kitchen door ajar he went down the passage, and the broken rhythm of his footsteps was more marked; his limp became more noticeable when he was tired.

Ruth heard voices, a small girl's voice and Hazzard's.

"Well, old lady, what is it?"

"Oh, please, will you come to No. 9 Summers Street? Mrs. Soper's bin took ill."

"All right. I'll be there in half an hour."

He came back to finish his supper, closing the door gently. His tired face was just a tired face, patient, resigned.

"Afraid I shall be late. Midwifery case."

"I'm sorry. You are tired."

"Oh, it's all in the day's work."

She noticed that he was hurrying to finish the meal. There were those bottles of medicine to be made up, and he would rush out into the dispensary, and grab bottles and write labels. Also, she knew that she was capable of making up simple mixtures, for in order to help him on occasions she had made him teach her to dispense.

She said, "I can do the dispensing for you, Chris. I expect it is quite straightforward."

"Quite."

"Then you can sit and smoke for twenty minutes."

He gave her a grateful look.

"Would you? I've had rather a heavy day. Quite sure—you're not tired?"

"Not a bit."

To Hazzard her face expressed gentle placidity. It was like a pleasant, soft surface, soothing and unruffled, or like a light that burned always with the same steadfastness. It was not that he took the glow of her for granted, but probably he was not conscious of the fullness of her illumination. The Ruth of to-day was not the Ruth of yesterday. She was stronger and in better health, and she had inward food to feed on. To Hazzard she had ceased to be "Poor little Ruth"; she was Ruth; he relied on her for more than he realized; a great part of his life was left lying on her knees. She had wisdom, the wisdom of the woman who stays at home, and waits and watches.

He got up, turned a chair to the fire, and lit a pipe.

"You had better go to bed, Ruthie. I shall be late."

She gave him a mother glance as he lit his pipe.

When he had gone out, she cleared away and washed up the supper-things. Housework did not tire her excessively; she was happy when busy; she had so much to think about, and had Hazzard known all her thoughts he would have been wholesomely astonished. There are degrees of tiredness. Ruth went to bed far less tired than her husband, and with a feeling of happy satiety, perhaps because she had expressed herself during the day as she wished to express herself. Hazzard had not.

And she knew it. That was why Ruth's happiness was relative.

IV

She turned up the gas in the surgery.

Here were three wooden chairs, a table, a dresser and a set of

shelves, rows of bottles, a sink for dispensing, an instrument cabinet, and a high desk upon which Hazzard kept his ledgers. The anatomical diagrams had disappeared from the walls; the skeleton, disarticulated, reposed in pieces in a box under the desk and was sometimes used as a footstool. Ruth had had brown linoleum put down, not for the pleasing of the patients, but because linoleum was easier to keep clean than a boarded floor. After dark the old shop windows were kept curtained to the ceiling, otherwise inquisitive people across the way might have had glimpses of the legs and bosoms that were displayed in this surgeon's shop.

Ruth loathed the surgery, not because it was a surgery, but because it was a makeshift, a little shabby place in which her love and her ambition felt themselves imprisoned. She loathed it because it was a sixpenny hack-shop, not unrelated to other shabby shops in Roper's Row. She loathed it because it so often smelt of people who did not wash. Always fastidious she was growing more so. But chiefly she loathed it because it was Hazzard's shop, and it was she who had compelled him to stand behind the counter.

He had left half a page of prescriptions on the desk, and she opened one of the ledgers. He kept his records with great neatness, but for the moment her eyes did not focus names and drugs and quantities; she was looking below the surface of things. During the last year her consciousness had become circular. She did not see life as a flat surface or as a succession of angles; she was aware of it as a globe in which she was centred, a kind of crystal sphere upon whose inward surface many happenings were reflected.

Oh, this business of getting and saving! She felt herself so responsible, for Hazzard had taken their marriage so seriously. In the very first month he had insured his life for a considerable sum.

She could remember herself gently protesting.

"But it's too much, Christopher. Two hundred pounds a year!"

And then the look on his face, and his answer.

"I'm not taking any chances, Ruthie, not on your account. I should be worried to death—if I thought——"

Amazing reality! He loved her, and as she had never expected to be loved. This shabby little drug-shop was a proof of it. And this business of getting a living because a man had a wife to think of.

But the prescriptions. She read them through.

"Mrs. Tubbs.—Haust. Gent. Alk."

"Mrs. Gott, Cock Alley. Lint. A bandage. Ung. Zinc."

Ruth queried Mrs. Gott. Hazzard was absurdly generous, and his practice was full of Mrs. Gotts, ulcerous, wheedling, alcoholic old women who seemed to live on lint and wool and bandages, and produced never a sixpence.

Ruth's devotion was learning to be hard for the sake of her husband. It appeared to her that Hazzard was not the Hazzard of ten years ago, a man who cut through opposition like a knife; he was softer; more human, blunted, more lovable perhaps. It did seem that sometimes men were shorn of their courage. Also, the world was apt to be a sponging world. Watching the gradual progress of his exploitation she had found herself developing a compactness, a sense of opposition towards all those other people who used her husband. Altruism was all very well, but not when your man was to be sacrificed.

She set to work upon the dispensing. At any moment the surgery bell would be ringing. It did ring while she was mixing her Haust. Gentianæ Alkalinus. She ignored the bell while she took down bottles and measured her doses. Always she repeated the formula aloud; it was her way of checking the process.

"Pot. Bicarb., one dram. Tinct. Zingi., thirty minims. Spirits of Chloroform, twenty minims. Infusian Rhei, one ounce. Make up to eight ounces."

She held the bottle under the tap, took a cork from the cork drawer, plugged it in, wiped the bottle, laid it on the dresser to await its label, and went to the door.

A small boy with a shiny tip to his nose addressed her peremptorily.

"Come for Mrs. Jones's medicine."

Ruth knew Mrs. Jones.

"Have you brought back the empty bottle?"

"No."

"Well, will you tell Mrs. Jones that we charge for unreturned bottles. You can come in and wait in the passage."

Instinctively she was tending towards autocracy, that very necessary chastening of an irresponsible democracy. She was beginning to understand economies that were still beyond her great man's ken. He was too large for some of life's little precautions. The responsibility might be hers.

She sent the boy off with the medicine, and was in the midst of another prescription when the bell rang again. A lady in a battered hat had called for Mrs. Gott's lint and bandage and ointment. The lady had a perfume, and snuffles.

Said Ruth, "Half a crown, please."

The messenger looked shocked.

"That ain't my business. Mrs. Gott says to me, 'Liza, be a h'angel and call at Dr. 'Azzard's for my stuff,' and 'ere I h'am."

Ruth replaced the white package on the desk.

"Oh, very well. If Mrs. Gott sends half-a-crown she can have her dressings. Good evening."

The battered lady retreated with sentimental protests.

"Well, I call it scand'lous, I do. Wantin' money from a pore sick woman—on the nail—so to speak—jus' as though you kept a pub."

Said Ruth, "This isn't a hospital. And besides, I suppose we have as much right to be paid as a publican has. You can tell Mrs. Gott that. She owes Dr. Hazzard for six months' attendance."

The lady banged the door, and opened it again.

"If I was Mrs. Gott I'd go elsewhere—for my doctorin'."

"Quite," said Ruth.

And again the lady banged the door.

v

At ten o'clock, having turned out the lights in the surgery and the kitchen, but left the jet burning in the passage, Ruth lit a candle and went up to bed. It was her custom to use a candle to undress by whenever Hazzard was out late. A memory lingered. She would not use the gas-jets in their bedroom, and usually she would lie awake listening for the sound of the street door opening and closing. However quietly Hazzard came in she would hear him.

But on this particular night she did not go straight to their room, but continued up the stairs to the top landing. The door of his laboratory was unlocked, and Ruth entered, and holding the candle bosom-high crossed over to the table under the window. The window itself with its panes of glass had the deadness of a black curtain, though the candle flame was reflected in it.

She looked at the table. There were the rows of test-tubes, the culture dishes, the microscope covered by a white cloth, the bottles of stains, the boxes of slides and coverslips. She lifted the cloth from the microscope, as though she were uncovering a statuette that had been left unfinished. Her eyes and mouth were poignant. She replaced the cloth.

To the right of the microscope a culture dish covered with a sheet of glass lay in the centre of a piece of white paper. Some pencil notes were jotted on the paper, the whiteness of which had

a greyish tinge. Ruth touched the sheet with the tip of a first finger, and drawing the finger tip along it left a trail of a more distinct whiteness.

Dust.

She saw herself and the candle and Hazzard's dusty table reflected in the blackness of the uncurtained window.

"He's wasted here," she thought, "because he married me, and we have to live. Yes, wasted. He has no time—for this."

VI

Hazzard was very tired.

"Lord love us, don't say there's two of 'em, sir."

There had been "two of 'em," but the second twin had been born dead, and the voice from the squalid bed had rejoiced.

"It's a mercy, doctor,—I've got seven. And when a man's in liquor 'e don't think."

Hazzard was repacking the midwifery bag. The room was very hot. It smelt of blood and paraffin and all to do with a newly-born baby and dirty clothes and hot, damp towels. It had no carpet, which was just as well. The paper on the walls could be described as a coloured smear. A woman in an apron was sitting on the one chair washing the live baby, a cracked basin at her feet. A battered, white enamelled slop-bucket stood at the bottom of the bed.

Said the voice from the bed.

"I ain't got the money by me to-night, doctor. My man's out 'a work."

"All right," said Hazzard. "You had better have some window open."

"It don't open, sir. Both sash-cords be broke. My man nailed it up."

Hazzard found himself in the street. He was glad of the street in spite of the fog that filled it. He was very tired; he walked, and in walking seemed to arrive suddenly at the door of No. 7 Roper's Row without having been conscious of traversing so much pavement. His senses were dulled.

He unlocked the door and saw the solitary gas-jet burning. He entered the surgery and put the midwifery bag away in the dresser cupboard, and struck a match, and saw two bottles standing in neat white wrappings ready to be called for in the morning. Ruth had saved him the dispensing.

He yawned, and the yawn contained a sigh. He turned out the

gas in the passage, and went softly up the stairs and into their room. A candle was burning, and Ruth lay awake.

"You must be tired, Chris."

"I am, rather."

Sleep—yes, blessed sleep—but even as he undressed he was aware of the room, and of how different it was from that other room. The foulness of poverty, of drink; the foulness of too many children; a foul bed, and a poor foul creature in it. Smells, stinks, greasinesses. He poured out cold water and washed. He was aware of Ruth lying there with her hair in two black plaits. The pillows and the sheets were very white. Her face—with its darkly intent eyes—was as pleasant and soothing as sleep itself. He drew a deep breath.

He felt less tired, or tired in another way.

Chapter Twenty-seven

I

RUTH had no children. Regarded sentimentally she should have been the predestined mother, but, like Hazzard, she had been so mistreated by other children in her youth that she retained in her a fear of children. Also, the Hazzards could not afford a family, which is held to be a monstrous and decadent excuse by those hearty people who appear to think a butcher's shop preferable to a chemist's laboratory. But finally and fundamentally neither Ruth nor her husband wanted children.

For, since their marriage, their positions had been reversed, not very consciously so, for an attitude can be unconscious. Ruth had come to Christopher in the likeness of a child, and had remained with him to become the mother. It was as though she had taken over from Mary Hazzard both a tradition and an inspiration, man and his manifestations.

Ruth looked for emergence.

She was not content to see her man as a little obscure, overworked general practitioner, exploited by a sponging poverty. Also, having developed as a woman a subtle yet simple understanding of the situation, she may have feared and did fear the loss of the great thing, both for herself and for Hazzard. Man is made for accomplishing, woman for suckling.

When woman appears as the spendthrift, something is wrong with marriage.

Ruth saved money.

Her air of pleasant, dark-eyed placidity concealed much scheming. Her secret cry might be, "If only I could make some money," but not being able to make it she set about saving that which was made. She kept Hazzard's books for him, and he left the household expenditure wholly to her.

His fees ranged from sixpence to five shillings. In the main his practice was extensively poor. His better-class patients, scattered through Bloomsbury, did not number more than a score, and to Ruth the remedy was obvious. She had seen shop windows dressed, and Hazzard had not mastered the very elements of window-dressing. The value of work done is relative. A hat that costs you seven and sixpence in St. Paul's Churchyard may be priced at

three guineas in Regent Street, nor is it quite the same hat. Ruth saw her husband's fees raised from the sixpenny to the guinea level, not because she was greedy or a snob, but because to her he was a great man. She believed in him with the same wisely ingenuous devotion.

So Ruth saved money, Hazzard's money. She saved it in a dozen different ways. She had a strong young girl in for two hours each morning to do the heavy work, having satisfied herself that Elizabeth was the right sort of girl, and a better financial proposition that some semi-decayed expert in a bonnet. Her experience of ladies in bonnets had been discouraging. Things disappeared, sugar, tea, biscuits. A cold half leg of mutton would appear looking mutely diminished.

Also, Elizabeth did the weekly washing, and it was dried on the roof-garden where smuts were a little less prevalent. Ruth had had a line rigged up between two chimney-stacks.

Her marketing was quite an intricate business. She learnt just how and where to obtain her values. She bought her vegetables and fruit in the open market in Cosgrove Street, patronizing particular barrows. Her groceries she purchased in bulk and stored them in a capacious cupboard on the first floor landing. She had a French niceness and discrimination. As a cook she could make sixpence blossom into a shilling. She could produce a seductive salad on fourpence. She baked her own cakes, and preserved her own marmalade.

She saved money.

She kept a little black-and-gold cash-box in the bottom drawer in her bedroom, and every Saturday night she balanced her accounts. Sometimes she showed them to Christopher.

"We've saved seventeen and threepence farthing this week."

Hazzard did not say much; men don't. But he did feel that Ruth was somehow unique, and was grateful to her, and what was more, he made her feel that he felt it. His appreciations were oblique. He had his moments of playfulness.

"The firm is in funds, Ruthie. Let's have an occasion."

His occasions were various. She still retained for him her childish reactions. She could enjoy. They would go to a theatre, pit seats of course, or visit Oxford Street. Hazzard remained conscious of his wife as a pretty creature, while realizing her as so much more than that. A new hat can be sacrificial.

Ruth banked her savings with the Post Office. She marked the day with a dish of strawberries and cream when her deposit showed two cyphers.

II

But saving can be a slow business, and Ruth was warm-blooded. When the spring came she would take her work up to the garden among the chimney-stacks where she cherished her pots of hyacinths and tulips and narcissi, for her economies had not deprived her of flowers. And she would sit there, and darn and mend and hem, and let her imagination fly forth like a bird and return. It brought back fruit to her, the seeds of a future flowering.

Superficially Ruth's outlook was limited to back windows and yards, and little strips of sooty garden, and roofs and chimneys and church spires, and the tops of trees emerging from the flood of brickwork. Also she had the sky and the clouds, and the eternal sparrows. She did not wholly approve of the sparrows, for they were apt to regard her young seedlings as salad. She had to keep the sparrows off with threads of cotton. But even this city-scope was not changeless. She could watch the ascent of that vast new hotel in Russell Square, the Imperial Hotel, a cubist cliff of yellow brickwork and dark girders cutting angles out of the sky.

This new building interested Ruth. It suggested to her the growth of a man, who, scorning the little futile theories of equality, thrust his head and shoulders above the crowd and overshadowed it. Also, out of the squared bulk of the building a head was becoming visible, the outline of a dome that was to dominate the whole structure. Obviously, the creator of this building had vision. His hotel was a new concept, at least for Bloomsbury.

It seemed to Ruth that a man could grow in the same way. If he had the essential greatness he would rise inevitably above the common level, and be seen afar. Even the envious little houses could not question the reality of his shadow, and since for Ruth all observed phenomena were very personal, she began to think of Hazzard growing in that way. But how? Obviously the necessary foundations were not to be found in Roper's Row. You needed a phenomenal site, and a structure that would be visible and very visible to the crowd. She was developing a housewifely shrewdness, while retaining a child's clarity of vision. She could ask the simple, direct questions.

She catechized their fortunes.

If you saved a hundred pounds a year, how long would it take you to save enough to escape from Roper's Row?

Why should not a 1*s.* 6*d.* fee be converted into a guinea?

How would you set about such a transformation?

Obviously, you should make it your business to be visible to the people who could afford to pay a guinea.

The creator of the Imperial Hotel had not set out to build it in Roper's Row or in Red Lion Square.

He was not building for sixpenny people.

Not that the sixpenny people were bad people; they were just sixpenny people.

Obviously.

Christopher Hazzard was your guinea-man in sixpenny surroundings. That was how Ruth saw it.

But the question of finance? You had to have capital, some capital, and how was capital to be come by? It might take them ten years to save a thousand pounds.

Hazzard still owned the Melfont cottage. It was worth, perhaps, two or three hundred pounds, and during a previous winter when Christopher had been ill and their fortunes had appeared somewhat desperate, they had discussed the selling of the cottage, and had decided against it. Neither of them wished to sell the cottage. It was more than a sentimental possession, and Ruth had been the one to set her face against the sacrifice.

"I don't want it sold, Chris. It's part of you."

She had excellent reasons, or rather—emotional justifications. Society had used her to strip Hazzard of one opportunity, and with gentle obstinacy she stood to oppose the selling of the thing that somehow symbolized his past.

"I don't want it sold. It would make me unhappy."

So the cottage remained to them.

At other times Ruth would sit on the housetop and gaze and gaze as though looking for a sail at sea. She could not say that she had any expectations. She had a widowed aunt who lived at Chagford in a cottage named "Vine Villa," a most proper little place with urns on pedestals and a white porch, and a bed full of calceolarias and geraniums and lobelia under each bow-window. Aunt Caroline had no children. She kept cats, and in the season she kept visitors who came to glorious Devon. She was a careful woman, with thin, square shoulders, and a slightly hooked nose. She wore a cap.

Ruth had written to Aunt Caroline to tell her about her marriage, and had received from her aunt a neat, precise, and circumstantial letter. Aunt Caroline's letters were never expansive, but Ruth had received the impression that Aunt Caroline was pleased. Aunt Caroline had gone so far as to say that if Dr. and Mrs. Haz-

zard happened to be in Devon she would be glad to see them at Vine Villa.

Ruth and her husband could not go to Devon, but Ruth did have two photos framed, and sent them to Chagford. And Aunt Caroline, who was very genteel, especially when she deigned to accommodate visitors, had the two photos placed upon her mantelpiece, and liked to call attention to them.

"Yes, that's my niece and her husband. Dr. Hazzard of London."

Aunt Caroline's opinion was that Ruth had done rather well for herself, and Aunt Caroline approved.

But Ruth could foresee no romantic rescue, no dramatic intervention from the outer world. She and Hazzard were like thousands of other obscure people submerged in the business of getting a living. If there was to be escape it would be a slow and laborious ascent on hands and knees. Though Ruth—as Ruth—and married to a little doctor who fitted his environment, would have been content to live on in No. 7 Roper's Row. It was like a queer, old, ugly face which you grew to love. She was happy, but her happiness was relative. She never forgot that dusty, deserted room with its microscope and incubator, and glass dishes; it was to her rather like an empty nursery, poignant and dead. She knew that Christopher was made for the accomplishing of greater things, and that their marriage had broken his career.

Also she had her own particular dread. It was that Hazzard should come to look upon their present life as mere sordid drudgery; that he should begin to think of it as a surrendering of all that he had striven for. It would cease to be a sacrament, and would become a sacrifice. He might grow restless, bitter, discontented.

Her devoted placidity concealed this fear. She was the secret watcher of her love, observing the flame of her life's lamp. Did it diminish or flicker?

She was like a mirror to his moods, to his comings and goings, to his risings and settings. She felt most happy when he lay down beside her at night. He was her man-child.

III

Elizabeth's fluffy head appeared in the opening of the leaded hood that gave access to the roof of No. 7. Elizabeth was a phlegmatic young woman with very large red hands, and a face that never varied its expression.

"A gentleman's called. I told 'im the doctor was out."

"What name, Lizzie?"

"Moor'ouse. When I told 'im Dr. 'Azzard was out, 'e asked for you."

Ruth looked a little confused.

"Oh, Dr. Moorhouse. Where did you leave him?"

"In the surgery."

Ruth put her work aside and tried not to feel flustered. About twice a year Moorhouse would pay them one of these flying visits, and, to Ruth, Moorhouse was not one man, but two men, Moorhouse, and her husband's friend. As Moorhouse she had no fear of him; she knew that he knew all that was to be known; she had discovered in him kindness, tolerance, understanding.

But regarded as Hazzard's friend he was different; he made her feel challenged, accused. She could imagine him taking the man's view of their marriage. Always she felt conscious of being on the defensive.

"Oh, Lizzie."

"Yes'm."

"Ask Dr. Moorhouse if he would mind coming up here. It is pleasanter up here."

The sun was shining, and while waiting for her husband's friend she looked at the flowers in the boxes, at the poplar tree, and lastly at her own feet. She was wearing an old pair of house shoes. She remembered that there was a hole in the stair carpet, and that the mending of it was to have been one of the day's good deeds. She wished that she was wearing other shoes, and that there was no hole in that carpet. She felt flushed and hypersensitive. Would he notice these things and regard them as deficiencies, shabbinesses to be recorded against her? He was so very much of the other world, that smooth, spacious, easy world which sometimes she dreaded. He knew her as the typist and the shop-girl. She asked to be known as woman.

Should she sit down or stand? There was Hazzard's chair waiting for Julian Moorhouse. Her sudden inspiration was to be herself. She sat down and resumed her work, edging buttonholes in a shirt. She felt more natural when she had something in her hands.

She heard him mounting the step-ladder; he came up deliberately, easily. She heard his voice.

"Really, it's splendid of you to let me come up here."

She looked at his face, and her dread of him disappeared. He was so big and brown and healthy; he smiled; he had his hands in his trousers pockets; he was wearing tweeds. His socks were light

blue and his brown shoes like chestnuts freshly turned out of their shells. His face was what Ruth described to herself as one of those wide-open faces, a happy face. It made you think of an open window facing south.

She did not get up. He did not expect her to rise.

"Christopher will be back about half-past four."

"Splendid."

He looked at her; he looked also at the house-tops and the sky; and at the boxes of flowers; and suddenly she felt that her shabby shoes did not matter. She was conscious—somehow—of being out in the open air with a man whose way of looking at things was of open air. She felt extraordinarily and doucely at ease.

She said, "I'm so glad you've come."

He sat down; he stretched out his legs, and brought out a cigarette-case.

"Mind if I smoke?"

"Please."

"You don't?"

"No."

He lit his cigarette, and lay back in the deck-chair. Ten years had changed Moorhouse very little. Success to him was not so much success in striving as success in gentle living; he was lazy and he laughed at his own laziness; the doing of most things came to him so easily that he did them supremely well and without any sense of effort. Life fitted him like his clothes. He should have been supremely selfish and stupid, and he was neither, for he happened to be unusual, a man who loved field sports, and who played games with exceptional skill, and yet had none of the good-looking flatness of the expert player of games.

He said, "This roof garden of yours is a great idea. Makes me think of Rome. How's Christopher?"

With her eyes on her work she made a placid, pleasant picture.

"Quite well. He got through the winter without 'flu.' "

"Busy as ever?"

Her soft lips grew firm. She drew the cotton taut and held it so. She appeared to reflect.

"Too busy. I'm rather worried."

She did not look at Moorhouse, but she knew he was looking at her.

"Overworking—is he?"

"It wouldn't be overwork if it were the right kind of work."

And suddenly she raised her eyes and looked full and straight at Moorhouse.

"I want to ask you a question."

"Well——?"

"Were you very shocked—when you heard—that Christopher had married me?"

Moorhouse returned her gaze. When his little daughter asked him just such a question he looked at her as he looked at Ruth. But Ruth was not a child, and while his face remained open to her he remembered all that tragic business. He could remember Hazzard blurting it out to him.

"Well—yes, I was shocked, but not in the way you mean. I think I am just as much your friend."

She continued to look at him for some seconds with that white thread held taut.

"It has kept him back. He is wasting himself here. That's my problem, Mr. Moorhouse."

"You think so?"

"But for me—he would have been on the staff at 'Bennet's.' He wouldn't be slaving in these back streets. Do you know, he never works in his laboratory now."

"And you want him to work there?"

"Of course."

She went on sewing.

"You know—how brilliant he is, what he should be doing. And it hurts me. It hurts me every day of my life. Men are cruel to each other. And I sit and think—how—I can help to get him out of this."

She paused and sat at gaze, and Moorhouse kept very still, for here were deep and unexpected waters. He saw her face as the face of a beautiful statue, idealized yet human, the mouth and eyes poignant, questioning, inspired. As a doctor he had listened to many confessions, both selfless and selfish, and in every human confession there may be regret, love or fear.

He said, "I don't think Christopher has any complaint to make. I haven't. I understand just how you feel."

She had her eyes on the bulk of the new hotel rising like a cliff above the lesser buildings. She pointed with the hand which held the needle.

"Do you see that building?"

"The new place over there?"

"Yes. It's to be a new hotel, one of the biggest in London, the Imperial——"

Moorhouse sat forward in his chair.

"The Imperial! Why, old Mack's super-creation. I know the

man. He has a place outside Winchester. Eccentric beggar, always ill, and always doing something new and vast. Well, what about the Imperial?"

She said, "Christopher ought to be like that. But he is in the wrong place. There's no room here, and no time, and people can't see how big he is or could be. I can. I always have done. That's what makes me unhappy."

IV

Hazzard returned soon after four. It had been one of his Marylebone afternoons, for he still acted as physician to the Hospital for Sick Children, and this appointment remained as the last link between him and the original purpose of his career. Overworked he might be, but his pride had this secret satisfaction and clung to it. "Physician to the Marylebone Hospital for Sick Children." For on those afternoons he could forget in himself the little struggling G.P., a tinkerer of rotten vessels, an applier of patches, doing everything in a hurry, and doing it less well than he wished.

They had tea on the roof. Ruth allowed Elizabeth to carry up the tray, but she went to her room and changed her shoes, and wondered what Moorhouse really thought of her confession. She had felt moved to tell him things, not merely for the sake of defending herself, but because the telling of things to a particular man or woman seems to help. Emotion must express itself.

But when tea was over she left Moorhouse and her husband alone together, and went and sat in the little sitting-room on the first floor. She understood that men wanted to talk, and that they would talk differently when a woman was not there. She did not feel excluded. She was not jealous of Moorhouse. She could and did think of him as her friend as well as Christopher's. He was kind to her, and there are degrees of kindness; men can be kind to a pretty creature, sex kindness, but Ruth had a feeling that Moorhouse was kind because he understood.

On the roof two men sat and talked, more intimately perhaps than either of them had intended. The provocation had come from Moorhouse.

Said Hazzard, "I don't regret anything. That's the strange thing about life. You find that you are less of a calculating machine than you thought you were."

Moorhouse reflected. Interference should be weighed on a sensitive balance.

"No—but she does."

He was aware of Hazzard's startled look.

"What, Ruth?"

"Yes."

"But—how? She doesn't strike you—as being unhappy?"

"I think, old man, she's rather like your mother, not physically—so much—as inside. There's no partisan quite like your mother, is there? Some women darn socks, and pray."

Chapter Twenty-eight

I

Ruth began to know her Bloomsbury almost as intimately as Mary Hazzard had known her Sisbury Hill, and she began to know it with a purpose. She had walked many times and carefully round every square, Mecklenburgh, Brunswick, Bloomsbury, Russell, Tavistock, Gordon, Bedford. Mecklenburgh Square was her favourite, separated from brother Brunswick by the buildings of the Foundling Hospital, but from Ruth's point of view Mecklenburgh Square had its disadvantages. The centrality and spaciousness of Russell Square appealed to her. Tavistock had a serene sedateness. She could admire the balanced beauty of Bedford. Bloomsbury Square she thought too near Roper's Row. She would stroll at her leisure under the shadows of the plane-trees, and survey each house with grave carefulness. She admired the great solid doors, and the brass knockers, and the well-spaced, generous windows. Solidity appealed to her. She saw these rows of Georgian houses as social cliffs in which you established yourself securely. She liked the iron railings; they were symbolical, defensive, hedging you in. As a woman she felt the inwardness of a house or a neighbourhood. She was all for shining paint and brass and white steps and dainty curtains. There were certain houses that gave her little qualms of delight and of desire.

She could imagine herself inside such a house, and standing at one of the windows. She would be able to see the open sky, and trees and grass, and people passing, but the people would not be too near to you. Space, protection. Nor would you feel yourself squeezed in between other houses that were overloaded with humanity and noises and smells; and at night garrulous and alcoholic fools would not argue and quarrel under your windows. Nor would there be any noisy children, children who seemed to suffer from chronic catarrh and lack of handkerchiefs. She was woman, but fastidious; she felt no urge in her to rush and wipe the noses of such children.

Once or twice she wandered farther west and explored the purlieus of Cavendish Square. Harley Street might be very illustrious, but it struck her as being solemn and sunless. She preferred Queen Anne Street to Wimpole Street or Welbeck Street.

Portland Place was too vast and draughty. She decided that she was satisfied with Bloomsbury; it seemed to her both more intimate and alive, and more homely in spite of its boarding- and lodging-houses and hotels.

She began to take particular notice of the hotels. They provoked conjectures. She assumed that people sometimes fell ill in hotels; and an hotel was a little centre in itself populated perhaps by some hundreds of people, people who could pay. She began to make a list of the Bloomsbury Hotels. She found them in Great Russell Street, in Southampton Row, in Hart Street. But the bright new bulk of the "Imperial" in Russell Square had a particular fascination for her. Its great white dome was complete, and carried a flagstaff with a gilded cap. An immense board over the portico advised the world that the "Imperial Hotel" would open its doors next year. It announced itself as both luxurious and homely. It was to be Melbourne and Toronto and Manchester.

Ruth would stand and gaze at that multitude of windows. The very adventure of the place thrilled her. And it did more than that. She would always remember that July evening when she saw all those windows flashing back a sunset, and the great white dome stained with a faint, ethereal flush. And the inspiration had come to her.

"Hundreds of people, hundreds of rich and comfortable people, a possible patient to each window! And if Christopher were called —whenever anyone was ill? And all the other hotels."

She had her flair. A voice in her exclaimed—"We ought to be right here." And from that moment Russell Square became the centre of her new conception. She would walk round it, looking at the houses, and wondering how much one would have to pay in rent. And was it possible to obtain a house? Rumour had it that Bloomsbury was regaining its glamour.

In imagination she saw Hazzard's plate attached to the railings.

"Dr. Christopher Hazzard, M.D., F.R.C.P."

What a number of letters he would carry! Was there a doctor in Bloomsbury who could compete with him in the matter of letters?

II

It was August and hot. For several days in succession the thermometer had touched eighty-five in the shade; the sky had a glassy glare; the trees in the squares were unable to move a leaf.

In such weather summer seemed to spend the day emptying sack after sack of stuffiness and heat into the narrow streets and

courts and alleys, until by nightfall every crevice was airless. Smells exulted. Humanity perspired, and perspired again and advertised the absence of baths. At night in Roper's Row every window was open, and people brought out chairs and sat outside their doors. Tempers were short; there would be quarrels; infants puled and squalled. Later still Roper's Row would lie awake, and in the stillness you would be conscious of hot humanity sweating and complaining and throwing off the bed-clothes. In some backyard a dog would start howling, bringing down imprecations, and maybe an occasional empty bottle.

In such weather Hazzard was overworked, and showed it, but he began to show it differently. The hot, dry weather brought summer enteritis, and half the infants in the district were whimpering, swollen-bellied little creatures. Diarrhœa—a deluge of it, and milk going sour, and fool mothers making things worse.

Hazzard grew irritable, and his irritability was both physical and mental. He was a man turning a useless wheel. This hot August and its stupidities synchronized with the gradual growth of an inevitable discontent. Probably he became aware of his submergence, and saw himself as the little sedulous dispenser of pills and powders. He was like a man shifting rubbish from one hole to another, or trying to be clean in a house that would never be clean. Useless work, wasted energy. He was conscious of futility, of a sense of failure, of being shut up like a convict to pick oakum when he might have been searching out the secrets of health's disharmonies. He had no time. He felt himself no better than a little quack handing out bottles of coloured water. Or like a scavenger you went round with your cart collecting life's rubbish, knowing that next day there would be the same load of rubbish waiting for you.

The craftsman and the creator in him rebelled.

There seemed to be nothing but ignorance, and children with diarrhœa and smells, and people who expected to be cured for sixpence.

"Damned fools!"

He went about with that "damned fool" look on his face. He grew sarcastic. What were you to do with people who gave infants whelks and beer and raw fruit and smears of cheap jam on chunks of bread? You might go on talking for ever and ever. Stupid cattle!

Education?

Supposing you sent a man with a megaphone into every street to shout out the simple rules of diet and hygiene, would these

people listen? Were they fit or in a position to listen? Were not some of the old plague storms merciful and wholesome, burning out the unfit and the filthy and the cankered? History had treated the Fire of London as a tragedy, whereas it had been a blessed cleaning and a clearing away of old rottenness.

There were days when Hazzard could have wished the sun a burning-glass to search and set a light to all this slime and confusion.

He would come back to No. 7 looking jaded and irritable. He would be silent. He would niggle at his food. When the bell rang he would get up almost like a snarling dog.

"Well, what do you want?"

"Please will you come and see Mrs. Piper's baby?"

To Ruth he would say, "Another damned fool. Feeding the little wretch on steak and kidney pudding—probably."

Ruth kept her vigil. She was a little afraid, because she felt and understood. And it seemed to her that what she had feared was happening. He was rebelling against makeshifts, the mere getting of a living. Essentially he was the searcher, a mind that would be satisfied with nothing but the quest of the *vera causa*. He was too ambitious in the best sense to be able to drug himself with routine, a palliative, the mere applying of a sticky plaster to a sore surface. He was made for the finding out of what lay below and behind the sore surface. He was becoming like his environment, a sore surface, eternally irritated, unhealable because the conditions of health were not there.

She watched and listened and thought. It seemed to her that her plan was the only possible plan. He needed rescuing, just as he had rescued her.

One August evening when the sun had set and the stars were coming out she heard Hazzard climbing the step-ladder to the roof. She had been lying out in a deck-chair, enjoying the sense of coolness that the dusk brought with it. The day had been torrid, and she had been feeling sick and in pain, suffering as women suffer. At such times she found other people's petulances difficult to bear, especially when she herself was feeling that she had every right to be petulant.

Hazzard joined her on the roof. The space was narrow, and somehow he managed to bump against her chair. She winced. At such times she was sensitive to the slightest touch.

"Oh, Chris."

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

He was tired and on edge. He sat down in the other chair, and she somehow climbing above the frailties of her own flesh, turned to him a soft surface. In marriage two people should not be tired and out of temper at one and the same moment.

"You haven't to go out again?"

"No. I'm not going out again for anybody."

"I shouldn't. It has got cooler. Put your feet up on one of the boxes."

He brought out a pipe, and filled it with fretful jerky movements of the hands. He was tired to the point of inco-ordination. And Ruth lay silent, sensing the occasion, and feeling his irritable tremors. Would he listen to her if she hinted at the changes she was contemplating? Would it annoy him? But perhaps he might be in a mood to listen, and so she let him light his pipe, and waited until the maleness of him should be soothed.

"Chris."

"Yes."

"I've been thinking. Couldn't we make a change? I have been thinking about it for a long while."

"What d'you mean?"

"Take another house, a better house, somewhere in Bloomsbury, of course."

He gave her a sudden, half-suspicious stare.

"Ashamed of this place? Is that it?"

She winced.

"Chris, you know it's not that."

And then they heard the burr of the bell in the darkness of the house below them. Hazzard got up with the secret and self-conscious anger of a man who knew that he had spoken cruel words.

"Damn that bell!"

He went down to answer it.

And Ruth waited. She wanted to be weak and to weep, but there was that something in her which refused to be weak. She held her emotions in leash. She lay and wondered whether he would come up to her again, and just how he would come. Had he realized that he had hurt her?

He came. He stood beside her chair, and touched her awkwardly upon the shoulder.

"Sorry, Ruthie—I didn't mean that."

She reached up and held his hand.

"Chris, you want a holiday. We'll have a holiday."

Her gentleness won him, as a woman's gentleness always will unless the man is that hopeless sort of beast who sees nothing but

the red rag of his own sex. He sat down beside her in the dusk. The tense wires were relaxed.

"We can't afford a holiday, Ruth. At least—I can't. I'd like you to get away somewhere."

Her gentleness had become his.

"But we can. Why shouldn't we go to Switzerland? You have always wanted to see that clinic at Leysin."

"My dear girl——!"

"Say—next month. The work will have quieted down. You can get a locum for a fortnight."

"And the money?"

"I have over a hundred pounds saved, Chris. A Swiss holiday isn't very expensive. I have been making inquiries. It wouldn't cost us more than thirty pounds. Besides, it isn't a mere question of money."

He made a movement towards her, and laid a hand on her knee.

"You're a rather wonderful person, Ruthie. I am rather at the end of myself. We'll go."

III

Neither of them had been abroad before, and Hazzard could command three French words—"Oui," "Non" and "Combien." Ruth was more articulate. She had spent three sedulous weeks with a French conversation book; her pronunciation was by no means perfect, but she was able to ask whether they had to change trains, and where the customs examination would be held, and whether they had time for coffee and rolls. She was the smooth young matron and the excited child.

"Oh, Chris, isn't it lovely!"

They slept passably well in their second-class corner seats, and when the dawn and Switzerland arrived together Ruth was torn between the windows and the state of her hair. They had the compartment to themselves. Hazzard was resuming his collar and his boots, and with them a feeling of youthfulness and adventure that were somehow Ruth. She was all flushed and bright eyed, kneeling on a seat, and surveying herself in a mirror.

"Oh, Chris, my hair! We don't get out yet, do we?"

"Another hour."

With two or three hairpins tucked between her lips, and balancing herself on the seat in front of the mirror, she was busy with her disorderly head. Hazzard rummaged in a hand-bag for a couple

of apples. He had heard that apples were good provender for travellers.

"Have an apple, Ruthie. We shan't get breakfast till half-past eight."

"In a minute."

So he sat and waited, and watched her and the landscape, and discovered himself asserting that his wife was really a very wonderful little person, and that this holiday was a great adventure, and that already he had ceased to feel worried and jaded. Always he had desired greatly to see Dr. Rollier's work at Leysin, and here they were in Switzerland, and Ruth had done it all, saved the money and arranged the tour.

He said, "You look rather nice, Ruth, with your hair like that."

She remained for a moment with her hands touching her hair. She was aware of herself as a new person, and of her husband as a new person. She turned on her knees, and looked at him—sidelong and secretly.

"Do I, Chris? I'm glad."

"Your apple's waiting. Feel tired?"

"Not a bit."

It was a voyage of discovery, and Ruth, having dealt with her hair, discovered the mountains. She had never seen anything higher than Sisbury Hill; nor had Hazzard for that matter, but Ruth's wonder was greater than his. She sat and gazed, and her face seemed to catch the light shining upon the white peaks.

"Isn't it wonderful, Chris?"

It was. He could enjoy it with her and enjoy her delight. He was happy in not being one of those much travelled and sophisticated people who are bored by exclamatory enthusiasm, and who are capable of saying, "Don't get excited; don't be silly." Her delight was flushed and vibrant and charming. She was discovering other things besides the mountains, the towering pine-woods that seemed on the march up and over the hills, the vineyards, the immensity of the blue sky.

"Chris, there's a chalet!"

"So there is."

"It looks just like a cuckoo-clock, doesn't it? Can't you imagine a cuckoo poking its head out?"

Hazzard was smiling at her.

"Eight cuckoos, and breakfast."

"Now—you're laughing at me!"

"I shan't laugh at breakfast when it appears. I'm most confoundedly hungry."

She put her hands on his knees.

"Chris, aren't you glad we came?"

"I am," and he kissed her.

IV

Ruth never tired of looking at the great blue lake with the mountains reflected in it. They were staying at a hotel at Territet within sight of Chillon, and Chillon is Chillon. Ruth was romantic; every lovable woman is romantic. She had to climb all those quaint staircases, and poke her dark head out of the windows, and shiver a little in the vault where Bonnivard had clanked his chains. She was quite sure that he had worn chains.

But the pith and the soul of the pilgrimage was their visit to Leysin where Dr. Rollier had discovered the sun.

"How obvious," said Ruth; "I wonder no one ever thought of it before."

Hazzard's answer was that such discoveries often look a man in the face or wait for him round the corner, but man can be amazingly blind, or so absorbed in rag-picking that the mystical pattern of life eludes him. The train was carrying them up the Rhone Valley, and Ruth gazed, and turned over the mystery in her mind.

"Perhaps, Chris, we only begin to see when we feel deeply about something. I mean—it isn't just cleverness that sees."

"Yes, possibly."

"Dr. Rollier was touched by sick children and wanted to help them, and probably he had that feeling in his mind all the time. And then he noticed how the people who lived in the Swiss sunlight up there looked so brown and well, and he put two and two together."

Ruth's psychology was personal. She was beginning to wonder whether Christopher could see beyond the end of Roper's Row. He had become submerged in Roper's Row. And life, as Ruth saw it, lay just round the corner.

Leysin was unique. It had not yet become a coterie of Clinics. In that brilliant and sparkling September air it was like a thought encased in crystal. But it was live thought. It was sunlight. And during those hours spent in that mountain village Ruth was very silent, and very conscious of Christopher and of Christopher's intent and searching face. She saw him transfigured; he had ceased to be the little, worried, general practitioner, a sort of Prometheus chained up in an obscure street. His face was clear and open; his eyes seemed brighter; he smiled.

The hillsides might be snowless, and the vineyards all purple and green, but neither Ruth nor her husband were likely to forget the picture that was painted for them of children like little bronze statues playing half naked in the snow. They sat at their lessons in the snow. They rolled and raced and sat in a world of snow and of sunlight. The White Death in their bones and glands was burned out, as by a burning glass.

Hazzard was fascinated.

"It is the sort of thing one has dreamed of, Ruth. It's getting at realities."

She felt that he envied Dr. Rollier as he envied no other man on earth, but this envy was splendid. In it compassion and the passion to accomplish were blended. She saw her husband's face as the face of the Man Christ.

"Money, Ruthie. People don't see; people don't think. And so often they put you down as an enthusiastic nuisance, a crank, a spluttering fanatic. If I were a rich man——"

V

They had taken the mountain railway up to Caux, and were sitting in the pine-woods, with all that blueness spread below them, and the green slopes, and the greyness of the mountains etched with violet shadows. The pine-woods were still, vastly still. The sunlight, sifting through, seemed to drop like little musical pearls of light audible only to fairies. The Dents du Midi impaled the blue sky.

Some English passed along the hidden path below, hot and strenuous. A man's voice broke the stillness.

"Got that bottle of red wine all right?"

"Yes, George."

"Sure?"

"Quite sure."

Hazzard smiled, and Ruth smiled with him. She sat close to her husband, not too close. He had a little aura of thought about him.

And presently he began to speak, as a man speaks to his other self.

"I have seen something, Ruthie, the sort of thing that has always been at the back of my mind. It's good to know that such things can be, for sometimes one begins to doubt. Over there in London—one seems to pick rags and patch old clothes."

She waited.

"It's bad work, false work. You haven't time to get at the truth

of things. And even if you did—under those conditions—what could you do? It's like trying to sort stuff out of a vast rubbish heap. One ought to try and start fresh—with clean country and clean children."

She touched his arm.

"Why shouldn't you start afresh, Chris?"

He smiled a little whimsically.

"I don't see my way to it—yet. Money, leisure; nothing that is worth while can be done without money and leisure."

Her hand felt for his.

"You have given up so much for me, Chris."

"My dear, do you think I regret it?"

"But I do—always. Yes, it's true. But I'm helping, Chris, in my way. Oh, my dear, always try to remember—that I'm helping. And it's going to come true. I know it."

He turned and looked at her.

"It won't be your fault, Ruth. You have made me believe in something. That's better than money."

Chapter Twenty-nine

I

Ruth, still wearing her hat, made haste to light a fire.

For No. 7 needed a fire; it had the chilly and hostile air of a house left empty, "Ah, you have come back, have you! Foreign travel! You'll be finding me poky, I suppose." Which was true.

Ruth had said, "It's good to be home, Chris," and then had wondered why No. 7 made her think of a dark cupboard, and why Elizabeth had not thought of lighting a fire. It was raining, as it rains in England in October, with a suggestion that it would never stop raining. Puddles, wet pavements, slime, dripping umbrellas, the plane-trees showing an autumnal pallor, London looking frowsy and grey.

Ruth knelt in front of the fire. She watched the flames catch the black coal; she spread her hands. She was a little shocked and puzzled at finding No. 7 Roper's Row so unfriendly and strange. Everything was just the same and yet different. Or was it something in yourself that had changed? The place felt clammy. Rain, rain, rain, and the street gutters full of slime. And somehow Roper's Row had shocked her; it had appeared so squeezed and narrow after the breadth of Switzerland; it was dirty; it had smells and orange-peel and bits of pulpy paper.

She had felt chilled.

Dr. Maconochie, a glib little Glasgow Scot, was talking to Hazzard in the surgery. Maconochie's idea of humour was to be rude. And Ruth listened, and was conscious of being uncomfortably sensitive to the locum's rasping voice. She felt wakeful and raw and questioning and suspicious. She could hear all that Dr. Maconochie said, and he barked things out like a little hairy dog. Everything was all right, perfectly all right. He yapped aggressively. He was explaining that he had to catch the night train to Stoke-on-Trent; he was expected there; he had to do the work of a man who was ill. Ruth heard the clink of money; Hazzard was counting out sovereigns and shillings. But why was Dr. Maconochie in such a hurry? Ruth distrusted his haste. No. 7 Roper's Row had filled her with a strange feeling of uneasiness.

Dr. Maconochie vanished, and No. 7 seemed to renew the rush of its routine.

The street bell kept on ringing. People shuffled in and out of the passage; the surgery door opened and shut; Elizabeth was collecting the supper-things on a tray and she collected them with vigour. Ruth went upstairs to take off her hat, and she paused half the way up the stairs to listen to her husband's voice. It came from the surgery, and it was angry, and with an anger that was unusual.

"Didn't I tell you that you had no right to have children?"

A voice whined.

"Oh, don't say, Doctor, that the poor little innocent will be blind."

"I warned you—two months ago."

"Oh, dear, Doctor. But it's dreadful, not t'ave children. The neighbours say such dreadful things—if you don't 'ave them."

"Woman, it's much more dreadful sometimes to have children."

There was a sound of hysterical emotion, and Hazzard's voice cutting through it.

"The trouble is there. No use my saying I told you so. Yes, the boy will be blind. You had better know."

Ruth went on up the stairs and into the little sitting-room. She was conscious of a sudden pang. Children? Was it dreadful not to have children? Other women had hinted to her. Other women seem to take pleasure in hinting at such things. But Christopher was her child. She knelt down and put a match to the sitting-room fire, and remained there looking poignant while Elizabeth came in and clattered and breathed heavily. Everything seemed so near, so raw. In Switzerland there had been serenity, space, sunshine, the infinite cleanliness of the mountains, whereas Roper's Row suddenly had made her shudder like an alley in the midst of shambles.

But supper. Hazzard came in, and instantly she saw that his face was clouded. During their holiday he had worn what she had called his "mountain face," bright and boyish and alive. It seemed to have slipped down into the shadow, the shadows of a sixpenny world.

They sat down to chops and tomatoes, and Elizabeth's chops had a toughness. There was silence, and somehow—Ruth could not bear the silence. She wanted to break it. She wanted to break other things, poverty, submergence, this routine that throttled.

"Busy—at once, Chris."

He cut the loaf, as though he had a grudge against it.

"Fools! One comes back to a world of fools. The stupid and the indiscriminate and the ignorant. Sentimental slush. What's the use of trying to help?"

She looked at him and then looked away.

"I heard something, Chris, about a child. I couldn't help hearing it."

"Oh, yes—a child. Blind. The parents had venereal disease and I warned them. But the great heart of the world—you know—demands children, even syphilitic and tuberculous children. And it accuses us—who see—of being selfish and ignorant. Talks of a house without children being a house without windows. What use is a window if it is stuffed with rotten rags?"

Rarely had she seen him so moved, and she wondered whether No. 7 Roper's Row had affected him as it had affected her. Perhaps he was tired, or it was the reaction after a holiday, especially after a holiday among the mountains.

She said, "It all seems such a muddle."

"Muddle! Of course. The wonderful common sense of the crowd is supposed to be in charge. Who was it that said the crowd is always wrong?"

She smiled faintly and to herself.

"I don't know, Chris, but other people always seem to know your own business better than you do. Doesn't London feel strange after Switzerland?"

"Does it to you?"

"Yes."

And then he laughed, but not happily.

"Yes, I suppose it's Leysin and those mountains, and the feeling that you had got above things. And here—you go plop again into the green pond. Switzerland made me feel that I wanted to start life all over again."

She kept a gentle and pregnant silence for some seconds.

"Well, why shouldn't we, Chris?"

"Realities, Ruthie. I don't see how it could be done."

"It might. You are wasting yourself here, Chris. You never go into the lab. You were born to find things out, and to help people finding things out, and to teach people."

He gave her a look of whimsical tenderness.

"Ah, that's what they won't forgive you, Ruth, trying to teach them. It damns them as ignorant, and they retort by pelting you out of the town. I'd like to spend my life trying to teach people not to have rotten children, that it is cruel and damnable to breed rotten children. How many homes are planned? Half of them are just the result of emotional mushiness and the indiscriminate sex urge. But when you get up against the child complex——"

He had finished. He pushed his chair back and wandered over to the fire and filled a pipe.

"I'm going out to look at one or two cases. That fellow Maconochie didn't quite impress me. Too full of yap."

"Must you to-night, Chris?"

"Afraid so. Same old sixpenny harness."

She was conscious of a tremor of expectancy. This was the first time that she had heard him use that phrase, though to her the implied values had become familiar.

Ruth was unpacking her little portmanteau in their bedroom when Hazzard returned. She heard him go into the surgery. He seemed to remain there for a long time. When he came up the stairs the broken rhythm of his limp was more perceptible. His face looked clouded and tired.

"Not in bed yet, Ruthie?"

"I've been unpacking. I've unpacked your things."

"Good of you, dear. Well, here we are."

He took off his coat and opened the cupboard door, and from the way he hung up his coat Ruth inferred that he had found something to worry him. She knew all his moods and their physical expressions.

"You are worried about a case, Chris?"

"Oh, a little. I thought the Glasgow gentleman was in a great hurry to depart. He has left a case of puerperal fever behind him."

II

Next morning the sun shone in a wind-blown, rain-washed sky, and Ruth went up to her roof garden and found her climbing nasturtiums still blowing their scarlet trumpets. The great poplar tree was full of green and yellow rustlings. The white dome of the Imperial Hotel flashed in the sunlight.

But how small it looked after the Dents du Midi! And Ruth stood at gaze. Her sense of perspective had changed. This little, leaded trough among the chimney-stacks, with its boxes and tubs of flowers, was a platform from which she looked towards new horizons. She had travelled as far as Switzerland and back; she was a little more self-confident, for she had brought back from lake and mountain a more complete consciousness of herself as wife and comrade. She felt more secure.

Also, she felt more adventurous, she—the sheltered, gentle creature. She looked upon her world of roofs and chimney-pots, and saw London as a city to be conquered and cajoled, street by street

and square by square, until the august gates of the West were open. Obviously, London was not to be conquered from Roper's Row. She dreamed, but with her eyes wide open.

She saw both the big and the little, those little, personal, touching details.

Christopher needed a new hat.

His frock-coat had been worn for a year.

Making silk curtains was more pleasant than picking rags.

Christopher was one of those men who ask for a new loom and threads of a richer colour in order that a finer pattern may be woven.

It is more pleasant to work and live among clean and educated people.

God made Switzerland; man made London.

But could you remake London on sixpence?

Didn't the wise men in the Bible go up to the mountain tops to commune with God, and then come down to give laws to the crowd?

You could not help the crowd while you were part of the crowd. No, not really. You were just sentimental.

Crowds have to be handled by the police.

Christopher—and others like him—should be super-policemen.

She looked towards the dome of the Imperial Hotel. The flagstaff was like a sword or a symbol pointing skywards.

III

There are women who are not surprised when the unexpected happens, for the unexpected appears to them as the predestined. They watch for the semi-miraculous and the inevitable. They have an almost childish faith in the advent of the thing prayed for.

So it was with Ruth.

The unexpected appeared, some three weeks after their return from Switzerland, in the form of a letter from a firm of solicitors at Exeter.

Aunt Caroline had died suddenly and unexpectedly of influenza and acute bronchitis. She had been hustled—poor soul—out of Vine Villa and away from the geraniums and stone vases and the photos of Dr. Christopher Hazzard and his wife.

She had left her niece a thousand pounds, free of duty.

Ruth wept a little.

"Oh, why didn't they let us know! I would have gone down. I did nothing."

But in her heart were glimmerings of grateful exultation. Money —a thousand pounds—her money! the miraculous had happened!

Said Hazzard gravely, buttering toast:

"I'm glad, awfully glad, Ruthie. A woman ought to have a little money of her own."

She was more than excited; she was inspired. She ran round the table and kissed Christopher as a woman kisses a man when she has something splendid and secret hidden from him and for him.

"Oh, Kit, isn't it wonderful!"

She was wondering whether he was wondering what she would do with the money. She waited for Hazzard to go out on his morning's round, and then put on her best hat and coat, and left Elizabeth in charge. She made for Russell Square. She had had her dream eyes on a particular house, No. 107. It had been empty and to let. The board was up still, and she stood by the railings of the garden, and looked across at No. 107. It was very much like all the other houses in Russell Square, but rather smaller than most of them; it had double doors painted a dark blue.

She saw her adventure.

There were the railings worthy of carrying Christopher's brass plate. "Dr. Christopher Hazzard, M.D.," etc. What a pity it was that you were allowed to put so little on a brass plate. Professional niceness in an age when every hoarding shouted.

And suddenly she was afraid of losing that particular house. Russell Square belonged to the Bedford Estate, and with a sang-froid that would have amazed her a month ago she walked to the Estate Office and talked business.

Yes, No. 107 was to let. The rent was £300 a year.

Inwardly she gasped, and asked a calm question.

"I should like to look over the house. If I like it would it be possible for you to give me two or three days? I have to see my solicitors."

"Certainly, madam. Of course we should want references."

"Oh, of course," said Ruth, "a mere matter of form. Perhaps you will let me have the keys."

At dinner she wore an air of placidity.

"Chris, I think I ought to go down to Chagford for a night. I should like to take some flowers. And I can see the lawyers at Exeter."

Hazzard found nothing to be surprised at in her proposal. He had spent the morning feeling grateful to Aunt Caroline. That legacy had relieved him of some of his anxiety. With her thousand

pounds and his insurance money his wife would not be left derelict should he founder.

"Where will you stay?"

"There is sure to be a place at Chagford. Or I could stop at Exeter and go over by train. I think I'll stop at Exeter."

She returned from Exeter with a smooth look and a suggestion of more colour. The heart-beats of life had been quickened. Her gentleness was dressed up rather charmingly as a little woman of the world. Hazzard had missed her; it was the first time that they had been parted; he looked at her with the attentiveness of rediscovery. His wife was a very comely creature.

"Everything is quite all right, Chris. I took some flowers. Poor Aunt Caroline was so ill—too ill to let us know."

Ruth was conscious of having been well and truly kissed.

"Glad to have you back, Ruthie."

She blushed.

"Dear. Mr. Armitage told me that the legacy would be paid to me almost immediately. Aunt left more than four thousand pounds. The rest goes to Missionary Societies."

She was full of her secret adventure. There were the Bedford Estate people to be dealt with, and she wanted advice, friendly assistance. She had thought of Julian Moorhouse. She had sent him a telegram, the most ingenuous of telegrams.

"Please come up and see me if you can. Chris doesn't know.—Ruth."

Moorhouse responded to that insouciant and naïve message. He arrived at about twelve o'clock, frock-coated and silk-hatted, to find Hazzard out, and Hazzard's wife all dressed up and with somewhere to go.

"Oh, how good of you to come. I wanted a friend to advise me. It's like this."

Moorhouse was told. He listened with his air of wise, debonair indolence. Yes, some women were amazing creatures. The cynics might go to Jericho and stay there. He sensed an occasion when the feminine mind was inspired.

"And Christopher doesn't know?"

"Not yet. But of course I shall tell him before I do anything final. I'm not mad. You see, it means a great risk, but then—hasn't one to take risks?"

Moorhouse reflected, and suggested lunch.

"Look here, let's go and have some lunch at Jules's. We can talk things over."

She was sufficiently pretty and well-habited to lunch creditably at Jules's, and Elizabeth was left with a message for Hazzard, and when Hazzard received it, he was perplexed.

"Mrs. 'Azzard 'as gone out to lunch with a gentleman, sir."

Hazzard asked no questions. It occurred to him that the gentleman might be Mr. Armitage from Exeter.

Moorhouse, meanwhile, was studying woman. She might appear to be the quintessence of emotion and of devotion, but in Ruth's case the inspiration was obvious and logical. Logical! What a word to apply to the adventure! And Moorhouse, having applied it, put it aside as one files a receipted bill. He sipped his Burgundy and let her talk. She had refused Burgundy. "Please, I'd rather not," and her refusal had implied a delightful prejudice in favour of a cool head. She talked, and he listened, thinking that he had never heard a case better put or argued. She said—as plainly as could be said—but without the bathos of egotism, "I ruined his chance five years ago. Now—my chance has come to give back something. He is wasted where he is. Christopher ought to be doing the big things. Everything in life that's big means taking risks, doesn't it?"

The man in Moorhouse shone upon her.

"Just what risks?"

She had worked out the details and she gave him them in round figures. The rent was the one formidable item, but her thousand pounds would pay the rent for three years and leave something over for more furniture. But to set against the risks of the adventure she could announce very possible assets.

"There are the hotels. That's what struck me. If Christopher could get the hotels. So much of life is making a show, isn't it? You have to have a shop window."

Moorhouse smiled at his wineglass.

"Exactly."

"If Christopher could work up a good practice he would have more leisure. He would have time for research. There is a good room at the top of the house that would make a splendid lab."

"By George," said Moorhouse, "you've thought things out," and he meditated and smiled, and looked at her with boyish eyes. "Remember my mentioning old Mack, Oswin Mack, who is responsible for the 'Imperial'? He is going to have a suite at the 'Imperial.' He will want a doctor. He always does want a doctor. Do you see?"

She did see.

"But could you——?"

"Why, of course. Old Mack and I get on rather well. He's an oddity. Loathes humbug. Christopher will vet him in town. He happens to be rather fed up with his own man in town. And that's rather intriguing. Happens to be old Fanshawe."

He smiled and ordered coffee.

"Quite a dramatic touch. Easy as putting sugar in a cup. Christopher lives in Russell Square. Obviously Christopher is old Mack's destined medical man. I—almost think I could call it a certainty."

Ruth's face was just the face of Ruth.

"Oh, how splendid! You are good."

He looked at her like an affectionate elder brother.

"Is it good to do what one likes doing? Christopher's too big for any favour of mine to fit him. Personally, I think you have had a flair. What about those agents? Like me to come with you? I can act as a reference."

She looked at the ring on her finger.

"Would you? It's all rather new to me. But of course I shall tell them that my husband—Dr. Hazzard—must see the house before anything is decided."

IV

It was a rapid afternoon for Ruth, and at four o'clock she could count on another hour of daylight. She had keys in her handbag. She found Hazzard in the surgery entering up visits and medicines in his ledger.

"Chris, I have something to show you."

He glanced at her and then at her bag as though expecting her to produce the article to be shown.

"Anything interesting?"

"Well—yes, but we shall have to walk to see it. Do come. We have just time before tea."

And Hazzard wondered, for his wife was dressed as for an occasion, and she had a niceness of taste in dress, and an air of adventure. Had Aunt Caroline's legacy gone to her head? What was the mysterious thing? A fur coat in an Oxford Street shop window? And if it was—well—Ruth had every right to buy herself a fur coat. How often had he loitered outside some window wishing that he could afford to put down two ten-pound notes and send the surprising thing home to her for a Christmas present. What though the coat come from the humble coney, it was fur, though discreetly edited.

They walked up Guilford Street. She had not yet told him

where and with whom she had been to lunch. His Ruth had become a woman of affairs. He became aware of her as part of the eternal mystery of things. She carried an air of mystery. And ahead of them the sky broadened over Russell Square, an early winter sky, opalescent, with the bare branches of the trees veined in black against it. The sky, of course, was explainable. Your physicist would have explained it as the interaction of light waves and the terrestrial atmosphere. But was woman explainable? and life——?

He supposed that Ruth would turn down into Southampton Row. But she didn't. She took his arm and prepared to cross the road to the path encircling the square gardens.

"Now——"

The way was clear, and they crossed, and went on round the railings until Ruth elected to stop. She had gained her viewpoint. She pointed with the hand that held the little, brocaded bag.

"There it is, Chris. No. 107. Our house."

She had surprised him with a vengeance. Woman—the unexpected, the incalculable! He just stood and stared like ordinary, mortal man.

"Is it a jest, Ruthie?"

"No, it's to let. I've got the keys here. I've looked over it. I want you to look over it."

"But—my dear!"

"Yes, I know it is three hundred a year, but I can pay the rent for three years, can't I, Chris?"

V

They had explored the whole of the house from coal-cellar to the uttermost top bedroom, and the stairs had sounded to their footsteps. The emptiness of the house had been made more empty by their voices. But Ruth's ardour had gone up and down beside the lameness of her mate, filling the empty rooms, making the house alive. For Hazzard's face had looked almost frightened, and so grave, and she had felt the need of wings, wings to her courage.

"Of course—we need not furnish the whole house, Chris, to begin with. Just the dining-room and your consulting-room, and a bedroom for us, and a bedroom for the maid. I'd just put up curtains everywhere. And that room on the top floor would make a splendid lab. for you."

Now, they were standing at one of the first-floor windows, and Ruth was holding her husband's hand. The western sky had a

flocculent redness. The trees were black. Lights began to prick the blue grey dusk, windows, street lamps. The spaciousness of the Square was alive, vibrant, full of the movement of vehicles and figures.

Said Ruth:

"This is where you ought to be, Chris. I have been thinking about it for such a long time."

He was silent. His face was extraordinarily grave.

"It's a leap in the dark, Ruthie. The risk."

She stood close, touching him.

"It isn't such a leap as you think. We shall never get out of Roper's Row—unless——"

"You want to get out of it?"

She nodded.

"You are wasted there, Chris. Think of all the hotels round here, and the boarding-houses and private houses. And here are we, with your plate on those railings. Besides, you will still have some good patients to start with."

"But your money, Ruthie."

"It's your money, too, Chris."

"Oh, no."

"But it is. Oh, Kit, don't you understand? You've been so good to me always, and I've never had a chance till now. I want to try and give back some of what I lost for you."

He was very deeply moved. He held her and was silent, looking out of the window at the darkening square and its lights. He understood. And from her soft warm body persuasion spread to his, courage, faith, the flair of her inspiration.

"Supposing you are right, Ruthie? Nothing venture, nothing have. But I'll pay you back that thousand."

"Then—you'll hurt me, Kit. Oh, my dear, it's all yours. Say you'll do it. I feel so sure—somehow."

Holding her in the hollow of his arm he watched the scattered lights.

"I'll do it. We are going to cross the Rubicon, Ruth. Let's go round and see those agents."

Chapter Thirty

I

So, Ruth became responsible for No. 107 Russell Square. The ground and first floors needed papering and painting, and Ruth chose a plain primrose paper and cream paint. The choosing of paper and paint was a simple affair, but the process of getting them applied was quite another matter. Her decorator put in his men, and No. 107 became a place of whistlings and splashings and gossipings, of paint-pots and step-ladders and trestles and planks, and pots of brushes and rolls of paper, and old coats and caps hung up on gas brackets. To Ruth—the enthusiast—No. 107 was a chaos that refused to be organized, or rather—it was organized chaos. No. 107 was full of song. When she arrived upon the doorstep she would hear a voice declaiming, "As yer 'air grows whiter, I—shall love yer more," and perhaps the perfunctory flip-flop of a whitewash-brush. There were other voices, whistlings. "'Arry!" —"Allo!"—"What price—the 'Spurs'—for Saturday?" And the whole committee would gather and discuss, and forget the business end of the day's inspiration, and throw spent matches and cigarette-ends about.

Ruth's key made no noise in the lock, but there always seemed to be a little sneak-boy in the hall, mixing paint or stirring whitewash, or doing something with a bottle, and he would give a bucket a kick, and the sound of debate would cease suddenly. Boards creaked. Sploshings and sandpaperings recommenced. Ruth would discover sedulous and innocent figures busy upon skirting-boards and window-frames.

She was received with silence, suspicion.

She came to measure rooms for curtains and carpets.

"Can I borrow a step-ladder?"

The responsible person, with walrus moustache and receding chin, and eyes of a leaden colour, would shout an order as though voicing a grievance.

"Alf, get the lady a step-ladder."

Alf was the boy.

Ruth found Hazzard sympathetic but cynical.

"They have taken a whole week, Chris, to paint the dining-room."

"Quite likely."

"I believe they play cards when no one is about."

"Also—quite likely."

"You know, Thomson promised me they would be out by the end of December."

"Oh, yes, they promise. But labour demands more leisure! Make up your mind, Ruthie, that they will be there till January 15."

"But it's—it's so silly."

"My dear, it's democracy."

Yet Ruth did persuade Mr. Thomson to remove his men and the boy by January 7, and then the delicious business began. She had been making her own curtains, and never would she have believed that a house could have so many windows. She was moved to resignation with regard to back windows. She seemed to have hemmed a mile of linen, and sewn on hundreds of curtain hooks. Her fingers were sore, but not her heart.

This was a woman's business. All these blue linen curtains were destined for the front windows to take up the note of blue in the front door. Ruth spent much time in Tottenham Court Road. She let herself go just a little over the dining-room and the hall, and the stairs to the first landing, a grey and blue Axminster for the stairs, and a Turkey carpet for the dining-room. She was lucky in picking up a good second-hand mahogany suite for the dining-room, sideboard, table, china-cabinet, and six chairs. No Roper's Row deal and oilcloth here. Christopher's private patients would be shown into the dining-room to wait. For the consulting-room she bought a roll-top desk, a leather couch, a bookcase, a pile carpet, and two fumed oak chairs, all second-hand. The drawing-room was an improvisation, a feminine *tour de force*, contrived out of the best of the Roper's Row furniture, with arm-chairs refreshed with gay cretonne loose-covers, a brass tea-tray, a second-hand Japanese screen, a Wilton carpet, rugs, a few pictures and bright faïence plates. She was rather proud of the drawing-room, and she had every right to be so, for she might have described it as "How to furnish on seven pounds, three and sixpence, and on ingenuity, taste, and research." The bedrooms and kitchen were to be Roper's Row removed and amplified. But Ruth could assert that her shop window was dressed quite sufficiently well to impress any caller who did not penetrate beyond the fumed oak table and hat-stand in the hall.

They were to move in on January 15. Meanwhile the ground floor of the house was complete, and Hazzard was taken to make

a state inspection. So complete was the scheme that Ruth had copies of the illustrated magazines laid out on the dining-room table.

She stood in the doorway and watched his face.

It was very grave, but she could tell by his eyes and mouth that he was saying things inwardly.

He was wondering how she had known. How had she known?

He said, "It's astonishing. You must have had to spend."

"One hundred and sixteen pounds, three shillings."

"On this room?"

"No, on everything. I think I have—must have—been into every furniture shop within a mile of Bedford Square."

"You've done it amazingly well, Ruthie."

"Have I? Do come and look at your consulting-room."

He was taken to see it, and he stood in the centre of the room, looking thoughtful.

"Rather different from Roper's Row."

She said, "We are leaving Roper's Row behind, Kit. Our dining-room isn't designed from Roper's Row."

He understood her. They had discussed Roper's Row and its purlieus and its people, and Ruth, with a childish candour, had made the position supremely plain.

"Of course you will leave all that part of the practice, Chris. I suppose you will tell—those people to send for some other doctor."

A devoted woman can be thorough.

Ruth was weighing out the imponderables. She had been one of the anonymous crowd, and therefore—in the course of cut-throat and romantic adventure—she brandished realities. Sentiment is all very well for those whose throats are secure from the knife. Even your gentle woman can be as fierce and ruthless as a leopardess when cubs and mate are concerned, and Ruth was much more logical than Hazzard, for his sake more than for her own. To sacrifice yourself in shabby streets in ministering to the poor might be a beautiful tradition, but Ruth had seen the poor, and therefore had no illusions about them. She had no intention of suffering her man to be sacrificed for the sake of those other people. She would have said, and did say, that you did not put a race-horse to pull a muck-cart.

Over this business of breaking with Roper's Row and all that it stood for she was extraordinarily and consistently determined. Like a gentle, but obstinate and persistent child, she would not let her man prevaricate or compromise.

"They just use you, Chris, that's all. They waste your time,

your precious time. People always try to get something for nothing. The doctor is the last person to be paid."

Her seeming hardness surprised him, but in the end she made him realize its inspiration.

"It's a mistake, Chris, to begin by being too easy with people. If we are all floundering together what's the use? The man who gets on a rock can throw a rope."

"Wise woman, Ruthie. You want your feet on a rock."

So Roper's Row and its neighbourhood were warned that Dr. Hazzard was going west. He did not say how far west he was going. There would be no surgery and dispensary in Roper's Row, and no additional consulting-room in Guilford Street. The six-penny chap-book was closed.

II

Three evenings before the exodus from Roper's Row, Ruth appeared before her husband in a dark blue linen dress with a white lace apron. Hazzard had had glimpses of that blue dress in the process of manufacture, but he had not divined its *raison d'être*. Obviously it suggested a uniform, something between hospital and parlour-maid.

She had the air of waiting to be challenged, and Hazzard was much more man than he had been five years ago.

"New frock, Ruthie?"

"It's my front-door frock."

What did she mean? And sensing the question in his eyes she made haste to make her point.

"Elizabeth isn't equal to meeting patients. She's a good girl, but she hasn't any style. I'm going to do it."

Hazzard had a moment's muteness before he protested.

"But, my dear girl. I'm not going to let you——"

Protest he might, but Ruth had made up her mind on his behalf.

"I'm going to be your nurse-secretary, Chris. Why shouldn't I be? The front door is going to be frightfully important."

"But—Ruthie."

"We can't afford two maids just yet, and Elizabeth would get flustered, and want to be matey with people. She would be quite impossible. She can look after the area door."

"But people will—— I'm not a snob, Ruth,—but——"

"People won't. I shan't let them. I'm going to be a very dignified young person."

She laughed, and he had to try and laugh with her. His Ruth was developing a sense of humour. She was supremely right and supremely wrong, but more right than wrong. She had a sense of atmosphere; she knew her shop, the importance of meeting people —customers—in just that right way. But his perplexed and worried face touched her. She went and kissed him.

"Let me do it, Chris, just for the first six months. I know I can do it, without letting us down. Besides—nobody need know."

"You bet they will know—later."

"Well—let them. I shall call myself your secretary. It will be quite all right so long as I don't wear a cap."

"What about the apron?"

"People will swallow an apron, Chris, when they'll jib at a cap. There are distinctions. Nurses wear caps—I know. Besides, it's how you wear a thing. I shall be just a little haughty, if necessary, helpful but haughty."

He said, "You are—rather—a wonderful little person. I see the idea."

She patted his chin with two fingers.

"If you like I'll wear one of those white overalls or coats. But—really—this matches the door and the hall carpet. The front door and the person who opens it—must be—awfully important, Kit."

He gave in.

"I'm a rather proud devil, but—upon my soul—I'm more proud of your grit. Well, it's Hazzard & Hazzard."

"Oh, Chris, you are a dear."

III

So No. 107 Russell Square confronted the world, with its blue curtains and blue door, and its brass plate, and its steps which Elizabeth whitened each morning. Elizabeth was so conversational; she would converse with anybody, policemen, messenger boys, taxi-drivers; she had a fund of language; she was capable of addressing a dignitary of the church as "You saucy old kipper." On raw mornings she was unashamedly candid with herself, "Damn these bloody old steps!" And Hazzard hearing her refer to the kitchen as "a bit of all right," had to allow that Ruth had discrimination, and however capably Elizabeth might function at the area door, she would have to be kept away from the front door as much as possible.

Ruth, in her blue uniform, held watch and ward by the economical fire which they kept burning in the dining-room. She as-

signed to herself regular hours of duty, from nine till twelve, and from four till seven. She sat patiently waiting for the new world to come and pull the brass handle of the front door bell. Occasionally, only too occasionally, in the right and proper sense, did that bell ring during the first month.

Ruth's answering of the bell was a stately affair. She had just the right kind of smile ready.

"Is Dr. Hazzard in?"

"He is engaged for the moment, sir, but if you will come in——"

She had a pencil and ledger ready. If the caller had come to ask Dr. Hazzard to visit a certain house, Ruth would take down the name and address. She was grave, practical, but sympathetic. She had divined the particular atmosphere that she wished to create. She was—so to speak—Christopher's shop-walker. She embroidered the truth, but she did it with niceness and discretion.

"Dr. Hazzard is very busy. I'll let him know directly he returns. Yes, early this afternoon, I expect. Urgent? Then I will try and get Dr. Hazzard on the telephone."

Telephonic communication was easily established after the visitor had gone, for Hazzard was up above fitting up his new laboratory, and Ruth ran upstairs.

"Chris."

"Hallo."

"A message. No. 57 Bedford Square. But don't hurry. I said you were busy, and would call as soon as you could manage it."

Hazzard was at work on some amateur plumbing, connecting his incubator and the Bunsen burner to the existing gas installation. He had an amused look.

"Diplomacy, Ruthie."

"Of course you are busy. This is just the place where you should be busy, Kit."

Then another problem presented itself, and Ruth took the solving of it upon herself without bothering her husband. Roper's Row showed a tendency to recur, it made an attempt to follow Hazzard to Russell Square, and to resume its exploitations. It came and rang the bell, and was either insolent or servile.

It was met by the young woman in the dark blue uniform. Ruth had her own way with these "sixpenny spongers," and a devotedly ruthless way it was.

"Dr. Hazzard is out. No, he does not take any surgery patients. You had better go for another doctor."

If Roper's Row and its world tried to argue or showed truculence she stood up to it with surprising determination.

"A doctor's got to come when 'e's fetched. It's the law."

"Oh, no, it is not the law. Dr. Hazzard does not practise in your neighbourhood now. He only goes to accidents."

On occasions her experiences were not pleasant, for there is a certain section of the proletariat that appears to regard a doctor as a social slave. It prates of wage slavery, and yet has no compunction about attempting to enslave brains. Ruth had trouble with a semi-drunk and truculent Covent Garden porter, and a passing police-constable intervened.

After this experience she bought a police whistle, but only once did she have to use it, and the very blowing of it blew the bully off the doorstep.

She was not going to see her man submerged once more in that feckless, ignorant underworld. Roper's Row had exploited him. The doctor was the last person to be paid. And so she made it her business to procure a map and to study the names of the streets and to memorize them. She was ready for all callers.

"What address?"

"No. 7 Pump Street."

She knew all her Pump Streets.

"Dr. Hazzard doesn't visit in your neighbourhood. You must go to another doctor."

And she would close the blue door.

Hard young woman! Snob! Climber! Not a bit of it. The world talks so much slush when it wants something for nothing. Ruth was determined that her man should not give something for nothing. He had given years of his life for nothing. He was giving twenty hours each week to his Sick Children for nothing. She did not grudge it, for that was enlightened, disciplined service; work that he loved, work that was useful. That which she stood out against was Hazzard's exploitation by irresponsible ignorance and dirt and fecklessness. He was not to be the slave of other people's animal appetites, their sex splurges, their unthinking production of life at its worst. If the social system was at fault, well—let the world listen to what such men as her husband had to say about it. She would allow the world to treat him as a riding-master, but not as a hack.

IV

For January and February Hazzard's fees amounted to eighteen pounds three shillings, about one hundred and ten pounds a year, less than a third of their rates and rent.

Both Ruth and Christopher were worried and neither would

allow it. Obviously the new practice could not grow and flower all in three months.

It was a matter of sitting and waiting, and economizing while keeping up appearances. They were cheerful with each other, wilful optimists.

"This time next year, Chris, you will be wanting a car."

But when he was alone in his upper room Hazzard's face betrayed anxiety.

Supposing the adventure should fail? He would have allowed Ruth to sacrifice her thousand pounds. And the moral effect of such a failure would be paralysing. All these years he had been struggling and contriving, and now he realized that he feared failure as he had never feared it before. It would feel so final. He was not so young as he had been; he was more ready to be discouraged; he had not the same audacity to attack—and to go on attacking. He saw life like London in a fog, absorbed in groping its own way, a mass of complex selfishness. If you got lost in the fog, who missed you? Who cared? Perhaps one devoted woman, or a man or two.

He was worried about his insurance premium.

It could not be allowed to lapse.

And yet—how absurd it all seemed. He had the knowledge, the experience, the skill. He was a master of craft, and could not prove it. He could not advertise his skill. He had to sit and wait.

Ruth also sat and waited, and watched the life of Russell Square, and listened for the sound of the bell. Had she dreamed a dream? Was she a devoted and ambitious fool, a mere impulsive child?

She would put coal carefully on the fire. She cherished the cinders, and baked them up. Their shop was open, and so few people came.

One afternoon early in March Hazzard surprised her turning a shabby person from the door, and when she had closed the door he asked questions.

"Who was that?"

She stood up to the occasion.

"A woman from somewhere near Lunt Street. I sent her away."

"A message?"

"Yes, I told her you did not attend in that neighbourhood."

He allowed his fear to betray itself.

"Perhaps we are making a mistake, Ruthie. One ought not to burn all one's boats. Did you take the address?"

For once she lied to him.

"No."

But she was wounded, because she had seen him in a moment of weakness. She knew. He could be weak because he could be afraid of life for her sake. And she felt sore and guilty and compassionate and tender.

"It doesn't matter, Chris. I know the work will come. Let's wait for it. I'd rather wait."

She clasped his arm.

"I—believe. Let's be obstinate."

He was astonished at her strength.

Chapter Thirty-one

I

MARCH did not bluster that year. It was a clammy, servile sneak of a month hurrying along in a grey ulster. On the first day of spring it snowed, and Russell Square was slush, and when Ruth looked out of the window she was moved to wonder whether any good could come of such weather. Influenza weather, bronchitic weather, and if good for the umbrella shops and the makers of mackintoshes why not good for the medical profession?

April 1st arrived with unexpectedness. All Fools' Day. It came up out of the east, bland and soft and golden, like a girl scattering flowers on the heels of a tax collector who had a bad cold in his head. It was one of those unbelievable days. It threw handfuls of sunlight right and left. The golden buds of the sooty lilacs shimmered. The world found itself laughing, and pointing a foot, and feeling itself gaillard and amorous.

Chancing to look from an upper window Ruth saw a suggestive thing happen. The Union Jack went fluttering up the flagstaff of the Imperial Hotel, and undulated languidly under the cap of gold. Spring and Progress had hoisted a flag. On April 1st the Imperial Hotel opened its doors.

Ruth had to remark on it to Hazzard.

"Chris, they have hoisted the flag."

Hazzard was shaving.

"April the first, Ruthie!"

"No, really. Do come and look."

Somehow she felt it to be an omen, and Hazzard had to come to the window, and watch that most adventurous of all flags floating high above the white dome.

He said, "Well, anyway, it's better than the Red Flag. Like life —it's a mixture, not all one colour."

Ruth began that April day with a feeling of excitement, She could not account for it; she might put it down to the sunlight, and yet remain conscious of its unaccountableness. It was the kind of day when things happened, pleasant things. The breakfast-table smiled at you. The teapot and Elizabeth had produced a particularly stimulating infusion.

Hazzard was opening his letters, mostly circulars, when the

front door bell rang. Ruth was up like light, and giving a smooth to her apron. She grabbed the appointment book from the sideboard, and intercepted Elizabeth who was on her way to the door.

"I'll answer it—Lizzie."

Ruth found a hotel porter on the doorstep.

"Dr. Hazzard in, Miss?"

"Yes."

"He's wanted at the Craven Hotel. Two visitors. It's urgent."

Ruth wrote impressively in her book.

"I'll tell Dr. Hazzard immediately. I expect he will be at the Craven Hotel in half an hour."

She went in and kissed the top of her husband's head.

"April Fools' day, dear! The Craven Hotel. Urgent."

She gave Hazzard's hat an extra polish, and saw that his overcoat was as it should be. He was apt to be careless about his clothes.

"There, Kit. I feel our luck has turned."

It had.

For while Hazzard was out two more messages came in, one from Tavistock Square, and the other from Beaumont Street. Both were new patients, and Ruth wrote in her appointment book, and said that Dr. Hazzard was very busy, but that certainly he would be at Tavistock Square and Beaumont Street in less than an hour.

She sat at the dining-room window and waited, and when she saw him returning she ran and opened the door.

"Two more cases."

She gave him the names and addresses.

"What was it at the Craven?"

"A bad influenza and a pneumonia."

"Oh, splendid! Oh, Kit, but I don't really mean that."

She returned to her window and watched the square with a feeling that somehow things were coming true. She observed a little blue figure cutting across the roadway from the direction of the Imperial Hotel, a page-boy in blue and silver, and wearing a little round cap. He dodged through the traffic, and glancing at the houses, made directly for No. 107.

Ruth waited till the boy had rung the bell. One should be a little dilatory and casual where boys are concerned.

She opened the door.

"Yes?"

The boy had a card in his hand, and he thrust it at her.

"It's important. Got to take an answer back."

Ruth read the card.

"Mr. Oswin Mack."

Scribbled below the name were the words—"Will Dr. Hazzard call at once."

Ruth slipped the card into her appointment book.

"Dr. Hazzard is out at the moment. I expect him back in an hour. I will give him Mr. Mack's message directly he returns. Mr. Mack may expect Dr. Hazzard to call in an hour."

II

The lift carried Hazzard to the top floor of the Imperial Hotel. The attendant opened the gate.

"Turn to the right, sir, along the corridor. You'll see Mr. Mack's card on his door."

A valet opened the door of Mr. Mack's suite, took Hazzard's hat and coat, and showed him into a room that faced west. This long room had no fewer than four windows, and the whole west wall seemed to be a wall of glass, with Russell Square, and London, and the April sky hanging there like a picture. You looked down upon the tops of the trees in the square. The taxis and vans had a flattened look, like beetles crawling on a path.

Hazzard saw a man stretched in a reclining chair with three bright red cushions under his head and shoulders. He was wearing a Chinese silk dressing-gown, and smoking a cigar. Hazzard's first impression of a patient was always swift and vivid, and the figure in the long chair insisted on the unusual. Hazzard saw the monocle, the blackened teeth, the long, pallid, acute face, the tuft of white hair, the cigar. Mr. Mack had a thinness that made him appear all knuckles and knees. His eyes were so darkly brown that they looked black.

He held out a long, thin hand.

"Excuse my getting up."

The hand was cold and silky, yet firm.

"One of my bad days. Sit down, Doctor. I don't suppose you will be able to do me any good."

His black eyes had an unwavering intentness. When he smiled, the lines of the pale and strenuous face seemed to crack.

Hazzard sat down with his back to the light. Mr. Mack reminded him very forcibly of a certain famous politician; the resemblance was extraordinary.

He said, "What's the trouble, sir?"

And the man propped against the red cushions appeared faintly amused, and pointing with the end of his cigar towards the row of windows, remarked upon the view.

"Pretty spacious, Dr. Hazzard."

"It is."

"My life's been rather like that. I have nearly burned myself out. Some of us do."

Hazzard was nervous, for he happened to know who Mr. Mack was, and how important Mr. Mack could be to a struggling little doctor, and in looking out of one of the four windows his eyes had sought out No. 107, and his thoughts had been of Ruth. Never in the old days at "Bennet's" had he felt afraid of a case, but London and the getting of a living had made him know that nameless fear. Fear is a humiliation and a spur. Hazzard curved his fingers round Mr. Mack's bony wrist, and felt the patient's pulse.

He said rather brusquely, "How many of these cigars do you smoke a day?"

"Twelve."

Mr. Mack had dropped the half-smoked cigar into a brass pot. He lay and watched Hazzard's face with a sardonic and quite fearless placidity. He was not worried about himself. He would go on smoking those twelve cigars whatever Hazzard might say to him.

Hazzard withdrew his hand. He had found a hardened artery, and a rapid and irregular pulse.

"Six cigars too many, sir."

Mr. Mack smiled at him.

"I wondered whether you would say that."

"It is my business to say it."

"It is your business to keep me alive. But supposing I don't care a damn, Dr. Hazzard, whether I live or die."

Hazzard looked him straight in the face.

"Well—why did you send for me?"

Hazzard's question, or perhaps his manner of asking it, interested Mr. Mack. It appeared to be a question that had to be answered. Ninety-nine questions out of a hundred need no serious answers, but there is always the hundredth question. Mr. Mack answered it.

"I wanted to see what you were like."

III

Hazzard returned to No. 107, conscious of that perplexity which contact with a whimsical and complex personality leaves in the

mind of a man who is content with nothing but a picture complete and accurate in its detail. Mr. Mack had a superabundance of detail, but also he had atmosphere, that something which attaches itself to a work of art, be it a picture, a book, or a man. Hazzard had investigated Mr. Mack as a body; he had investigated him very thoroughly. He had arrived at the conclusion that Mr. Mack, regarded as a body, was a very shaky fabric, but that Mr. Mack considered as a mind was reinforced concrete.

Hazzard had tried his knuckles on that concrete.

"If you won't take my advice, sir——"

"That's my responsibility, Dr. Hazzard. When the world wants to get something for nothing it begins to talk socialism. I want you to look after me."

"But I shall not be doing you any good."

Mr. Mack had proceeded to light another cigar.

"I see. That's your ideal. The job is not worth taking on unless you feel that you can produce some results."

"Otherwise—I should be getting something for doing nothing."

And Mr. Mack had given him a glance of intelligent friendliness, and had said, "Oh, well, supposing we call you my insurance inspector," and had offered Hazzard a cigar. "Put it in your pocket, Doctor, and smoke it this evening."

So Hazzard had glided earthwards in the gilded lift of the Imperial Hotel, feeling that he had been in contact with a person who had perplexed him. Obviously Mr. Oswin Mack was as wise as any physician as to the shakiness of his own physical foundations. "My steel is crystallized, Doctor," which was an admirable way of putting it, "I may live five years or five minutes. Arteries wrong, heart wrong, kidneys wrong. Exactly. Now, as a conscientious physician you would like to wrap me up in cotton-wool. I have no intention of being wrapped up in cotton-wool. So—there we are." And Hazzard had left Mr. Mack's suite after Mr. Mack had placidly appointed him his medical attendant. But what for? Mr. Mack was neither a valetudinarian nor a sentimentalist.

While Hazzard was crossing Russell Square Mr. Mack instructed his valet.

"Soames."

"Sir?"

"Go downstairs and tell Mr. Gaiter that I want to see him."

Soames went instantly. He had been seven years or so with Mr. Oswin Mack, and he knew that when Mr. Mack said "Go," or "Do this," the response had to be immediate. Mr. Mack had no use for the presently or to-morrow man, or for that English casual-

ness that smiles and promises a performance and a date and arrives with smug apologies a week too late. Mr. Mack was placid and ironical and pleasant so long as he was not thwarted; obstruct him, and suddenly he appeared to tower over you like a menacing and glittering iceberg.

Soames took the message to Mr. Gaiter in his private office, and the manager of the Imperial Hotel, a spruce, brisk, sallow person admirably tailored, got up from his chair and walked straight to the lift. He, too, knew his Mr. Mack as one of the world's power-stations. Mr. Mack had spent his life in accomplishing remarkable things; he had cared for nothing but the accomplishing of things. It had been his game, and he had played no other sort of game. The men who played the other sorts of games were his hirelings.

Mr. Gaiter went straight in. Two minutes had elapsed between the time of his receiving the message and his appearance in Mr. Mack's suite.

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Gaiter, when a doctor is needed in this hotel, Dr. Hazzard of 107 Russell Square is to be called in."

"For the staff, sir?"

"For anybody, visitors in particular. A first-class doctor ought to be considered part of this establishment. Notify the inquiry office, and the head porter."

"Yes, sir."

"Good."

IV

Ruth had shown herself very curious about Mr. Mack, but she had discovered in her husband a certain reticence.

"He wants me to attend him."

"That's splendid, Chris. Do tell me what he is like."

"Like? Rather like a long, thin snow-man with a big cigar and two black eyes. What the Midlanders call 'a card.' "

"What's that?"

"An original, a person. I'm to see him twice a week at a guinea a visit."

"Why, that's more than a hundred pounds a year, Chris."

Hazzard looked thoughtful. He was not quite satisfied with Mr. Mack's half of the arrangement, for however much Hazzard might fear failure, he remained afraid of being under an obligation. But obviously, the day's high fortune was not to be quarrelled with, and securing of a patient such as Mr. Mack overtopped all the other events of the day as the Imperial Hotel dwarfed its

neighbours. He could inscribe in his ledger and day-book the names of five new patients. He had penetrated into two hotels. He could detect in his wife's voice a note of happy exultation.

She went and stood at one of the windows. The windows of the Imperial Hotel were alive with April sunlight; they were eyes to Ruth's eyes. The tops of the trees, gently swaying, seemed to greet her with congratulating gestures.

"It is beginning to come true, Chris."

She was conscious of a little breath of victory.

Chapter Thirty-two

I

It had come true.

But reality is alive with unexpectedness, and the thing realized is never quite the thing foreseen. Men and women and circumstances intervene, and even when your house is built and furnished, interference comes knocking at the door.

It was to knock at the door of Ruth's happiness, but that was not yet.

There were rare occasions when Mr. Oswin Mack was helped by Soames into the lift, and so descended upon the outer world like an old eagle swooping from his eyrie. Assisted by the head porter and his valet, for his burnt-up body was failing at the knees, he was put into a big Daimler, and driven along Oxford Street and into Hyde Park, and then through all those notable streets and squares where the savour of greatness lingers. Berkeley, Grosvenor, Cavendish, Park Lane, Brook Street, Piccadilly, The Green Park, Queen's Walk, St. James's Street, Carlton Terrace. Mr. Mack loved London as only a man who has travelled far and fiercely can love it, and to him London was like a notable and supreme woman, known and possessed but never with resigned completeness. Here was a richness divined but not wholly seen. Here were memories, names, the faint perfumes of passionate days, of adventures and things accomplished. His restlessness had a Georgian vigour, a high colour, a serene swagger. He saw London as the London of the Georges.

Mr. Oswin Mack's progresses were unexpected. To get into a car and be driven off just fifty yards might be a surprising and incalculable adventure. No. 107 Russell Square. Soames rang the bell and then gave Mr. Mack his arm to the blue front door.

Ruth opened the door. Her six months had elapsed, but she continued to wear her blue uniform and to open the door.

Mr. Mack looked at her with his very dark, sea-rover's eyes.

"Dr. Hazzard in?"

Now Ruth knew Mr. Mack, though this was the first time she had seen him. There could be no other Mr. Mack, maker of men and arbiter of their affairs, a figure as trenchant and singular as that of a Disraeli or a Chatham. Had he worn plaid trousers and

a velvet coat he would still have been Mr. Mack, romantic, truculent, suddenly magnanimous. He belonged to an age that was passing, and through that ironical monocle he appeared to be observing the new world of smudged faces, mass-production man in the making. So might Don Quixote have observed the swarming road-lice of Mr. Henry Ford.

Ruth said that Dr. Hazzard was out, but she expected him back in half an hour, and would Mr. Mack come in and wait. He had raised his hat to her.

"I will. It is Mrs. Hazzard, I think?"

Her brown eyes were held by his. He had looked at many women in his time, and always he had known them by the way their eyes met his. There were eyes that flickered, or remained hard, or stared self-consciously, or assumed a babyish softness. There might be one self or two selves behind a pair of eyes.

"Yes, I'm Mrs. Hazzard."

She had betrayed her surprise, but it was an innocent surprise.

People who are absorbed in a particular purpose may forget to be self-conscious.

"So, it's a partnership. Excellent."

He smiled. He dropped his monocle and let it dangle at the end of its length of black ribbon, and to Ruth the dropping of that little circle of glass changed him. She could not say how or why. He was the same Mr. Mack, yet different. It was as though his scrutiny had ceased to be cold and impartial and had become friendly.

She made way for him to enter.

"There is a fire in the dining-room."

He tottered with dignity to the door of the dining-room, and looking in, asked her a question.

"Do you sit here?"

"Sometimes?"

"But now?"

"No, upstairs. But it's not very tidy."

She was aware of that white tuft on his chin and of his restless eyes.

"I'll come upstairs—if I may. I'm not feeling like a patient. Yes, I can manage the stairs."

He mystified her not a little; he had frightened so many people. But she was not afraid of him. She just wondered. He looked so fierce and potent and yet so frail.

"Can I help you?"

He would not be helped; he went up the stairs holding himself

as straight as a ramrod, one hand gripping the rail of the banisters, his feet moving as though he were working a treadmill. She followed; she held her breath; there was a something in her that went out to him. Gratitude? No, not gratitude. Something more personal and impulsive, a little tremor of compassion. She had had her moment of intuition. She felt, where other people looked and saw nothing but a monocle and a bleached face.

She slipped past him on the landing, and had one of her cretonne-covered chairs ready for him by the fire. He gave her a look of homage.

"Thank you."

With his hands on the arms he let himself down slowly into the chair, and she realized that this was something of an occasion, and that Mr. Mack did not painfully ascend such a Scala Sancta without good reason. She sat down in the chair opposite him; she had her work-table at her elbow, and she resumed her work, the buttonholing of a blouse, for living with Hazzard had made her a very natural creature. She had not a shred of old maidishness in her. Nor did she apologize to Mr. Mack for doing the natural thing.

She said, "My husband is becoming so busy."

Mr. Mack was observing her. To him Hazzard's wife was neither lady nor shop-girl, ancient nor modern: she was woman. She was comely; she had an expressive, soft voice; she wore the uniform of service; she was busy with her hands. Mr. Mack knew the sex from cotton stockings to silk ones, and Hazzard's wife was Hazzard's wife,—woman. He fixed his eyes on the essentials.

"Yes, London is beginning to discover your husband."

"He's rather wonderful, Mr. Mack."

And then he surprised her, but as she came to know him better she ceased to be surprised at the sudden and outrageous things he said.

"My dear, don't ever become genteel. Stay as you are, just as you are."

She gave him a startled and serious glance.

"I have never thought about it."

"Don't. Consider the lilies of the fields. Genteel women are damnable."

Now what exactly did he mean? Was he hinting at the future? And she stole another glance at him, and discovered something. Yes, what was it? And suddenly she knew, or was sure that she knew. That bleached face with its restless eyes and little tuft of hair on the chin was the face of a man who was horribly lonely. He was watching her hands.

"Won't you stay and have tea with us?"

"Thank you, I am going to."

"Christopher loves talking to you."

"Mrs. Hazzard, your husband has the makings of a fanatic."

She smiled.

"Has he? I hadn't thought of him in that way. He's so tremendously keen. He is doing research work again."

"In that lab. of his upstairs?"

"Yes. Perhaps he has told you."

"He has."

"An article of his is appearing in the *British Medical Journal* next month."

"What's it about?"

"Oh, streptococci, and the way they are found working in tuberculous lesions."

Mr. Mack was inwardly amused. He did not ask her what streptococci were; he happened to know; but the significant point was that Ruth had some understanding of her husband's work, and was the enthusiast in the home, which was rank heresy according to the modern feminine credo. Mr. Mack was not attracted to the women whose cult was self-expression. His prejudices were prehistoric. "All this talk of ignoring sex! When you have produced me a woman—minus stomach and glands and other organs, I'll be willing to recognize the worker bee. Till then woman regarded as a mere intelligence remains something of a monstrosity."

He played with his monocle.

"Your husband's particular enthusiasm——?"

"Oh, yes, sick children. You know—we haven't any, Mr. Mack, children—I mean. I sometimes wonder."

She hesitated, and looked a little confused.

"Explorers, dear lady, don't carry children about with them. Children, yes, the raw material. That's Hazzard's idea—I expect. He would like to be a kind of Luther Burbank to children. Catch them before they are sploshed and spoilt."

"I think it is more than that. You see, he was a delicate child, and I think when he sees a crippled child—he remembers. He doesn't talk much about it, but he feels."

"I see," said Mr. Mack; "rather a fine hobby when you come to analyse it."

Then Hazzard came in, and was surprised to find Mr. Mack in Ruth's extemporized drawing-room, but he did not show his surprise. Ruth was looking at him with eyes of conscious pride, for Hazzard had changed, and as yet she had no cause to question the

change or to fear it. He brought with him into the room an indefinable air of confidence, the consciousness of things accomplished. He was more sure; he was busy. The very lines of his face were more defined and firm.

He shook hands with Oswin Mack.

"It's good to see you here, sir."

"I thought I would call on your wife, Hazzard."

Ruth smiled at her husband.

"Mr. Mack is going to stay to tea."

II

The Imperial Hotel was the last of Mr. Mack's creations. He could refer to it as "The child of my senility," and certainly it was a mild affair when compared with the Central African Railway, or the Union Steamship Company. The Imperial Hotel could have been buried many times over in one of Mr. Mack's mines.

Challenged, he could explain this child of his old age.

"My dear sir, I wanted something to play with. A dotard's doll-house. I might have married a young wench, but I prefer to house other men as residents in my own hotel to finding them secreted in my flat."

Such had been Mr. Oswin Mack's career, a storm of creating, accomplishing, energizing. He had built his pyramid, sailed his galleon through strange seas, stolen his golden fleece and dropped more than one Medea overboard. He would have felt at one with Richard Cœur de Lion, or with Bayard or Columbus or the Borgias. He had been one of the first men in the world to go aloft in an aeroplane, a mad machine piloted by a mad-eyed enthusiast. He could say with Landor, "I warmed both hands before the fire of life."

Such men do not die, they explode, for to Mack life had been a series of explosions, and before the reverberations of the last had died away he was preparing for another. But these explosions were becoming gentler. The Imperial Hotel was no more than a squib, though it was to prove a very successful squib. Mr. Mack had never let off any damp fireworks. Also some of the pale, strenuous ferocity had gone out of his creating. He had become playful; almost he was Lobb; and playfulness is near to pity.

To Hazzard he said one morning: "Doctor, can you see me as the chairman of a hospital?"

Hazzard could. But there were obvious difficulties: Governors' meetings, functions, social and otherwsie.

"Are you consulting me as your doctor?"

"Very much so."

"But—the business?"

"I settled that. I behaved like an autocrat. I agreed to serve if all the meetings were held here. By the way, I believe you will be on the board."

Hazzard looked startled.

"I——? How?"

"They tell me that this year you become one of the two senior physicians at the 'Marylebone.' The two senior physicians have seats on the board. Any objection to me as chairman?"

"None, sir."

Hazzard carried this piece of news about with him during the rest of the morning. It seemed to grow in significance and in possibilities, for the Hospital for Sick Children had lacked just that one thing, a presiding personality with the power to energize and to co-ordinate. The retiring chairman, Sir Hartley Hunnybun, was a charming old gentleman who could visit the wards and play with a doll and use a playful finger on some child's ribs, but his charm ended there. He was the sentimental man, useful at a hospital garden party, but a fumbler at finance. And the usefulness of a hospital was dependent upon finance.

Hazzard's moods of preoccupation were increasing. They were unrealized by him. When success begins to come strangely and swiftly, a man's eyes may look ahead down stream and less at the river banks. When he opened the blue door of No. 107, and slipped the latch-key back into his waistcoat pocket and hung up his hat, he was more and more the man of affairs.

He went straight up the stairs to his laboratory. He had some cultures to examine. The incubator was in action, and it was one of his wife's duties to run up periodically and glance at the thermometer. He sat down on his high stool, and removed the silk cover from the microscope.

The luncheon gong sounded. He did not hear it. He was absorbed in thinking and looking. So much of his work depended upon what he saw in those dishes and test-tubes and under those glass cover-slips.

Someone knocked.

"Yes?"

"Lunch, Chris."

"All right. Coming."

Ruth waited for him on the upper landing at the head of the stairs. She continued to wear her blue uniform till four o'clock in

the afternoon, and Hazzard had not questioned her wearing of it. Apparently he had grown accustomed to it. But Ruth was wearing it with a difference. They had added to the staff of No. 107, and a neat and bright little person was learning how to open a door and to open it wide, and to meet a patient as though that particular patient was the one person in the world. Ruth left the front door to Nellie, and deputized when Nellie was out. She kept Hazzard's appointment book and his accounts and typed his letters, and was becoming something of a laboratory attendant as well as a wife.

She had reasons for continuing to wear that blue linen dress with its nurse's apron, reasons that some women and very few men would have understood. Mr. Mack understood it, but he was unusual. He saw it as a symbol and a vestment, and as a challenge and a question. It expressed a something in Ruth's mind, an attitude consciously and silently adopted. Mr. Mack sometimes wondered if Hazzard, who was the most acutely observant of men, noticed how his wife was dressed, and why. A genius may be as blind as a bat in the obvious daylight.

Hazzard came out of his laboratory, closing the door gently after him. He saw his wife waiting there. She was always there like the serene and watchful guardian of the temple.

"I did not hear the gong. Shall you be in this afternoon, Ruthie?"

"Yes."

"You might keep an eye on the incubator."

She watched his face; she was watching her man's face more attentively these days, but without his being aware of it. And sometimes his face would make her think of a window with the blind drawn down.

They went to lunch. Nellie, after handling the vegetable dishes, had taken her stand by the sideboard, and Ruth said gently, "You need not wait, Nellie. We'll ring."

Hazzard glanced over his shoulder at the closing door.

"Extraordinary piece of news this morning."

Ruth waited, as some women know how to wait.

"Mack is taking on the chairmanship of the Marylebone."

His eyes had an intent and distant look. He did not know that his wife knew; that men, even the Mr. Mack, tell things to certain women, and that the women to whom men tell things need not vex their souls about the franchise.

She said, "You're glad."

Of course he was glad. It was a remarkable coincidence, but

probably he did not realize that there had been no remarkable coincidences in Mr. Mack's career. Mr. Mack was purposeful even when he played.

"Immense possibilities, Ruthie. His personality and money and power. Just the man we wanted to interest."

"You are short of room."

"We could double our work. But there are the fundamentals."

"Mr. Mack is a man who sees."

"That's it. He's got vision, and that makes him more practical than the so-called practical man. He doesn't look into the bottom of his hat."

She said, with an air of grave softness:

"You are thinking of that other thing, Chris, a children's home in the country."

His whole face lit up.

"That's it. To be able to begin at the beginning. To get sun, air, right conditions, to have life under one's hand. An English Leysin, or as good as can be got in England."

"It's a great idea."

"It's reality."

III

A woman, when she loves, is quick to notice little things, courtesies, tendernesses, forgetfulnesses, silences. They may mean nothing, and they may mean everything, especially to the woman who sits at home. And Ruth was noticing little things.

Six months ago, Hazzard, when he returned, would come straight up to the drawing-room if she did not happen to meet him with a message. Always she had been conscious of his coming back to her.

But now when he came back he would go straight up to his lab. He passed her door. He would shut himself in with his work.

It was natural. And perhaps it was inevitable, but as she listened to his limping footsteps going up the stairs she would be aware of a little feeling of emptiness and disappointment. Also, she was made to remember those early days when she had first known him, days of ruthless struggle when he had shown to the world a face of fierce unfriendliness. He could become so absorbed in his voyages of discovery. He was a busy man and growing more and more busy.

She was left more alone. He hurried in and he hurried out. He would sit down to meals with the air of a man feeding upon other food while he ate the food she gave him. He grew more absorbed and monosyllabic.

"Don't wait tea for me, Ruth; I shall be late."

More often he called her Ruth, and ceased to use the more intimate diminutive Ruthie. He did not observe things about the house, what she did and what she contrived. If she bought new cushions and made the covers herself, and put one in his favourite chair, he used it and did not appear to notice its newness. She supposed that he was so busy observing his patients that he might forget to observe his wife.

But was it so?

She had no one to talk to, nor was she the sort of woman who would gossip about her more sacred affairs, and yet other women could have preached either cynicism or rebellion.

"Most men grow like that, my dear. They take things for granted. Think of nothing but the business and money and golf. You're a fool to sit at home. A woman must have a life of her own. You are out of date if your world is no bigger than your own hearthrug."

But Ruth was neither a cynic nor a rebel, nor would she have fallen to the illusion that a woman is completely woman when she has a life of her own. She was not made that way. But she had become aware of an increasing loneliness, of Christopher's gradual absorption in his work, of the hurry and tension of success. Yes, success! Was it one of the ironies of life that success should kill or paralyse the happiness of the earlier struggle?

She did hint at it to Mr. Mack, not as a personal experience, but guardedly. She was seeing more of that bleached person, for he came regularly once a week, and hauled himself up the stairs of No. 107, and had tea with the Hazzards. And very often Hazzard would be out, or come in late.

With a half-playful severity she accused Mr. Mack.

"You see how busy Christopher is."

"Success, my dear lady. Sometimes it comes like an avalanche."

She sat mute, remembering Switzerland.

"And buries people."

"Not always. Besides, a man must climb his mountain—or feel that somehow he has been frustrated."

"All men?"

"The men who matter."

He put up his eye-glass and focused the fire. Yes, the men who mattered. But then he—Oswin Mack—had never shared his life with a woman. He had had adventures. But in these days of his dotage, as he was pleased to call them, he was finding himself looking at life as he looked at London from his windows at the top of

the "Imperial." Possibly he saw life more completely, more impartially.

He said, "Always let a man have plenty of rope. You won't regret it if he is the right sort of man."

She, too, looked at the fire. She smiled, but her smile had a tinge of wistfulness.

"I've so wanted this success for him. If it makes him happy. Besides, it isn't only for himself."

"That's what we think."

He touched her with irony, and regretted it. She was not made for irony, and he could not give her sentiment. He loathed sentiment. Always it appeared to him like pretending that the white lily is as satisfying as rich red fruit. He brandished his eye-glass and looked fierce.

"Somebody said that man wants money and success and woman. It's true. And what the devil does woman want? By the way, excuse a personal question, but how long are you going to wear that blue dress?"

She came out of a thoughtful stare to give him one of her child's glances.

"Why, don't you like it?"

"To a point. It's an admirable costume in its way. It makes me think of something between a private secretary and a nurse. Get something fresh. Tell Hazzard to——"

He saw her flinch, and he stuck his monocle in his eye, and once more observed the fire.

"Well—no. I expect you know your own business better than I do."

IV

Hazzard came in late. He had 'phoned from the Imperial Hotel that he would be late, and would Ruth put dinner back half an hour. Such problems are perpetual in a doctor's house, and Elizabeth had been warned that dinner was to be at eight. And when Elizabeth was peeved she said sarcastic things to her oven.

Hazzard had an engrossed face. He spread his table napkin, and finding the soup too hot, paddled his spoon in it.

"Oh, by the way, Mack's giving a dinner next week. An official affair at the Imperial."

"An official dinner, Chris?"

"To the Hospital Governors, and one or two others. He is taking up the idea of a sanatorium."

"Chris, I'm so glad. How splendid."

"It looks like the beginning of something big. We shall get our formal invitation."

She looked at him mutely for a moment.

"Am I expected to go?"

Hazzard had found the soup sufficiently cool.

"Of course. That's obvious."

"Chris, then I shall want a dress."

"Get a dress, get a good dress."

"An evening dress?"

"Of course."

Chapter Thirty-three

I

RUTH spent hours over the problem of that dress.

To begin with she proposed to make it herself, and then it occurred to her that this frock was going to be the most important frock she had ever worn, far more important than her wedding-dress, and that a home-made frock might find her feeling naked and shivering of soul on that notable night.

She was a little afraid of this dinner. In all her life she had never been to a formal dinner. She felt very shaky as to etiquette and behaviour, and seeing in the window of an Oxford Street bookshop a little volume with the title *Manners for Women*, she bought it, and studied it secretly. Somehow she had never foreseen this other aspect of success. It made her stand and hold her breath and consider. She felt suddenly and acutely responsible for herself as Hazzard's wife, the wife of a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians. And who were the Hospital Governors, and would they be very elevated and terrifying?

She was most horribly afraid of appearing either cheap or foolish or both,—of letting Hazzard down. She had no origins. In her bad moments she could imagine people saying, "Oh, of course, Dr. Hazzard married beneath him. I believe his wife once served in a shop." She shuddered at the thought. She was not a snob. She wanted to be what every woman wishes to be in marriage, if marriage means anything to her, a flower which her man can wear over his heart and look with pride into the faces of other men. She wanted to be able to share his success.

So, she took no chances with that dress. She went to Ray's, and sacrificed half a year's allowance. She chose a rose-coloured silk ninon all fluffed out and filmy and flowerlike, for these were the years before the war, and looking at the reflection in the fitting-room mirrors she knew that she had chosen well. Even those devastating mirrors and the two superior ladies in charge of the case could not frighten away her feeling of smoothness.

"It is just madam's style."

"Just madam's colour."

She had a flair for dress. In fact a love of dress might develop into her one form of dissipation, and seeing herself as a dark-eyed

comely creature in that rosy "creation," she was glad as all women should be glad. She was conscious of an access of confidence, of a little tremor of anticipation. Christopher had never seen her in such a dress as this, and she wanted him to see her in a new way, as a charming creature fit to flower anywhere. She began to fore-feel a little personal triumph.

She said nothing to Hazzard about that frock. She curbed the desire to get it out and show it to him, or to put it on and appear before him as a pretty wife of a successful physician. She kept it as a surprise. She was quite confident that Mr. Mack would approve of her in that frock.

On the great night Ruth went up to dress at six. The dinner was at half-past seven, and she wanted to be alone while she dressed, for on such occasions even the most unselfish of women find man superfluous. She took great trouble with her hair, and for once her hair consented to go just as she wished it to. Happy omen.

Hazzard was out paying visits to two or three patients who were seriously ill. At half-past six she heard the front door close. She heard him calling.

"Ruth."

She opened the bedroom door.

"Chris, it's half-past six."

"Get my dress things ready, will you, Ruthie? I have just had a message from Tavistock Square."

His voice sounded hurried, and on such an evening haste was an unwelcome companion.

"I'll have them ready, Chris. We mustn't be late."

"It can't be helped."

She heard the front door bang, and she returned to her toilet, but somehow the smoothness had gone out of her hands. She too felt hurried. She rang for Nellie to help her into her frock, and Nellie's hands were cold and fumbling. But Nellie was approving.

"It is lovely, ma'am."

She got rid of Nellie, and after glancing at herself anxiously in the long mirror and wondering whether her shoes should have been black instead of silver, she began to open drawers and lay out her husband's clothes. He had two dress shirts; she chose the better of the two, and hunted out his gold studs and links, and hurt a finger in persuading a stud through the starched buttonhole. But she could not find a white tie, though she rummaged and opened collar-boxes. Surely he had a white tie? And at last she found one crumpled away under a pile of handkerchiefs, a ready-made tie and very much out of date. But it would serve; it would

have to serve. But she wished that she had exercised a little more forethought; she had been too absorbed in her own dress. And what helpless, absent-minded creatures men were, the men with other-worldliness inside their heads.

Leaving everything ready on the bed she went down to the drawing-room and looked at the clock, and stood in front of the fire. Five minutes to seven! What a pity! For she had so hoped for smoothness and leisure to look and to be looked at, and she was beginning to feel anxious.

At five minutes past seven she heard Hazzard come in and rush upstairs. His limp was exaggerated. He went straight up to the bedroom. She could picture him struggling into that starched shirt. And then she remembered that she had forgotten his pumps; he did possess a pair of pumps. She was conscious of giving a little wifely shrug. He would have to find them.

Apparently he did find them. It was five-and-twenty minutes past seven, and she had delayed putting on her cloak, for that pink frock was expectantly waiting. She heard him hurrying downstairs. He opened the door.

"Ready?"

"Chris, come in a moment."

He came in.

"Haven't you got your cloak on? It's time to go."

She gathered up her cloak and a smile. She had a sudden horrid feeling that things were going disastrously.

"Chris, my new dress. Do you like it?"

He looked at her with a kind of hurried surprise. He did realize that his wife looked very pretty, but the appreciation was smothered by other preoccupations.

"It's a very nice dress, dear. Did you make it yourself?"

"No, it's a Ray."

"Oh, a Ray. Put your cloak on. We are just three minutes late."

II

The lift carried them to the top floor of the Imperial Hotel, and here the solicitous Soames collected Hazzard's hat and coat and Ruth's cloak, and announced their arrival.

"Dr. and Mrs. Hazzard."

There were a dozen people in the big room. They stood in groups chatting, waiting for the two late arrivals. The room was brilliantly lit, and to Ruth all these men looked very large and formidable. She noticed at once that there was only one other

woman present, a very tall madam in black velvet, wearing a rope of pearls and a mass of magnificent black hair that was poised on her head like a helmet. This other woman's back was towards the door. She was talking to Oswin Mack.

Mr. Mack edged round the tall lady and came to meet them, moving stiffly on his long and spastic legs. He had his eye-glass in his eye. It was a monocle occasion. He looked at Ruth as he had always looked at a pretty woman admirably gowned.

"It is a doctor's privilege to be last."

There was a glimmer of mischief in the glance he gave to Ruth.

"And beauty's right."

Ruth felt rigid. She thought the men's faces looked rather like their shirts, starched and unfriendly, so many solemn surfaces. She saw the tall woman shaking hands with her husband, and beginning to talk as though she had been silent for five years. She did not look at Ruth, and next moment Mr. Mack was introducing Ruth to her.

"Mrs. Hazzard—Lady Sillocks."

Ruth was aware of two very cold blue eyes casually attentive to her for the moment. A hand touched hers and withdrew itself. There was no smile on that very voracious face with its sallowness and its suggestion of cream cheese firmly set in cold weather. "Glad to meet you." And then Lady Sillocks reverted to Ruth's husband and her own rapid and strenuous conversation, and Ruth was left standing very much on the edge of things.

Old Mack rescued her. He took her across to a tall old man with a white head and a rosy face.

"Colonel Graham, may I introduce you to Mrs. Hazzard? You are to take her in to dinner."

Colonel Graham bent at the hips. He was both old and new, a rather charming person who looked shrewdly down on life from his great height, and smiled upon it.

"Delighted. Mack, you are being guilty of favouritism, but I don't object; I don't object."

He was the old man courtier but not the old man fool. He was kind. He looked at Ruth as though he discovered her at once to be a pretty creature and more than a pretty creature, and was grateful to her for bringing the posy of herself into the room. He glanced a little ironically at Lady Sillocks and made an inward murmuring about "Minerva and Proserpine." He looked to Ruth rather like a nice, stately old dog.

He said, "I believe this is supposed to be a rather serious occasion, Mrs. Hazzard."

He smiled and his smile came back to him from her young face. She felt better, immensely better, standing beside this big old man. It was like being under a tree during a heavy shower.

She looked up at her sheltering tree.

"Are you one of the Hospital Governors, Colonel Graham?"

"I have that honour."

A waiter appeared with a tray of cocktails. He presented his tray first to Lady Sillocks, who, without ceasing to converse, took a glass from the tray. The waiter moved on to Ruth, and she, mesmerized by those glasses two-thirds full of orange-coloured liquor, imitated Lady Sillocks. She held her glass and waited upon Colonel Graham. She had heard of cocktails, but never in her life had she sampled one.

"I hope this isn't very strong?"

He stooped to the child in her.

"Shall I see?"

"Please."

He tasted the stuff, and looked at her with playful gravity. Obviously she was innocent, delightfully innocent.

"Oh, no, quite mild."

She raised her little glass and drank, and felt the stuff like a hot wire uncoiling itself inwardly. Her throat was virginal, and she had drunk instead of sipping. She felt a horrible, insurgent something swelling in her throat. She went red; she set her teeth and held her breath. She fought the disastrous, surging splutter.

Colonel Graham, snatching back one observant, anxious stare, looked steadily at the top of Lady Sillocks's head, and talked for her respite.

"Really wonderful suite this—of Mack's, Mrs. Hazzard. Makes me think of a glass house on the top of the world. The view—perhaps you have seen the view? Yes. Makes the traffic look like a procession of ants. I hear you live in the Square. I have an affection for Bloomsbury. It brings back Thackeray."

The struggle was over. She had conquered, and smothered the insurgence of the flesh, and she had learnt a lesson. When in doubt refuse, and refuse with an air of serenity. But she still held the glass, and was too shocked and self-conscious for the moment to get rid of it. She felt breathless after her escape.

"Let me take your glass."

He was supremely and discreetly blind. He did not appear to look at the vessel, but relieved her of it, and placed it on the top of a revolving bookshelf with his own beside it, and came back and stood over her with debonair fatherliness.

"So your husband is going to tell us about this sanatorium idea. Sounds to me to be just what these London kiddies need. I expect you know all about it."

She looked up at him like a grateful child.

"My husband is such an enthusiast."

"That's good. And there's another, but not quite the same brand."

His jocund blue eyes indicated Lady Sillocks.

"What the world calls a remarkable woman. Have you met many remarkable women, Mrs. Hazzard?"

She, too, was observing Lady Sillocks. She was quite sure that she disliked Lady Sillocks, and disliked her whole-heartedly. She wanted to hear more about this Britannia who was addressing Hazzard as though he were a public meeting.

"No. Is she very remarkable?"

"Very," said Colonel Graham, "utterly utter—as they used to say in the eighties."

III

They went in to dinner. Mr. Mack sat at the head of the table with Lady Sillocks on his right, and Hazzard on his left. Ruth found herself next to Colonel Graham at the foot of the table, and on the side opposite to Lady Sillocks. She caught the gleam of Mr. Mack's monocle. It was an occasion, a Sillocks occasion.

When Mr. Oswin Mack gave a dinner it was done in the grand manner, with splendour, but without offence. No one could eat one of Mr. Mack's dinners and go away saying "How filthily rich this fellow is." You had to allow that the man had studied the niceness of the lavish. Ruth, of course, had never seen a table with so much silver and glass and cutlery and flowers and fruit upon it, and little dishes of olives and burnt almonds and chocolates. She counted four wine-glasses to each person, and the elderly gentleman on her right hand picked up one of the glasses by its slender stem and was twirling it round and round.

"Waterford—I think?"

Ruth realized that the remark was addressed to her. She did not say, "I don't know anything about glass." Her pause might have been assumed to be judicial.

"Yes—I think it is Waterford," and she discovered that a plate of oysters had been placed in front of her. She had never attacked oysters. How did you attack them? She glanced across at Lady Sillocks who was haranguing Mr. Mack, while her plate of shell-

fish waited. How the woman talked! Why couldn't she get down to business and supply Ruth with an indication?

Brown bread and butter was handed. Ruth said, "No, thank you," because she did not know whether you placed the brown bread and butter on the table or on your plate. She looked at her neighbour's plate. She felt that her hesitation must be becoming obvious. *Manners for Women* had not said anything about the eating of oysters.

But that paladin of a colonel was picking up a fork.

"Ever been to Burnham-on-Crouch, Mrs. Hazzard?"

"No."

She felt so very grateful to him. Deliberately, and as though her hesitation had been no studied pause, she selected the right fork, and waited to see how Colonel Graham used his.

"You must have travelled a very great deal."

"Not always willingly, dear lady. Burnham is not a bad place in the oyster season."

He began to eat oysters, and Ruth followed suit. Lady Sillocks was still talking! almost she wagged a finger at Mr. Mack. Was the woman too remarkable to be interested in food!

A waiter's hand held a decanter poised over Ruth's sherry glass.

"Sherry, madam?"

She said quickly and decisively, "No, thank you," and the decanter disappeared. It reappeared for the benefit of Colonel Graham. Colonel Graham took sherry, especially Mr. Mack's sherry.

Ruth had suffered some breathless moments, but with the appearance of the entrée her feeling of tension relaxed. The faces of the elderly gentlemen had grown friendly, and like their shirts, far less stiff but quite as polished. He of the Waterford glass on Ruth's right gave her no trouble, being so thoroughly interested in Mr. Mack's dinner and in Mr. Mack's wines that a young woman in a rose-coloured dress was neither here nor there. But undoubtedly the countenances of these eminent and puissant persons had mellowed very considerably; they beamed upon Ruth; even Lady Sillocks's face became less like cold cream cheese.

A voice said, "One glass of champagne won't hurt you, Mrs. Hazzard." The old, blue eyes were kind.

"But I never drink champagne."

The blue eyes rested upon her.

"Well, certainly you don't need it."

"Do you?"

"Now, that's unkind."

"Oh, no. I couldn't be unkind to you."

He smiled at her. He was amused, very gently amused, but quite on his old knees to her innocence. Mr. Mack had collected two remarkable women, and Graham considered Ruth the more remarkable of the two.

"Mrs. Hazzard, I think that's the nicest thing I have had said to me for a long time."

"But I mean it."

"I believe you do, and that—little lady—is what makes it so charming."

She gave him the glance of a happy child. Really, she felt that she was trembling on the edge of success. Certainly she was a success with Colonel Graham. Mr. Waterford Glass came to the surface between the game and the sweets and rediscovered Ruth and the olives. He thrust the dish at Ruth.

"Have one?"

"I'd rather have a chocolate."

She felt safer with chocolates, and Colonel Graham reached for the chocolates.

"Quite right. You don't require olives."

Mr. Waterford Glass grunted ironically.

"Well, I do. The colour of my—I beg your pardon. These—are —olives."

So it seemed. Lady Sillocks was eating olives, and Ruth watched her. In fact she was beginning to watch that other woman with a feeling that somehow Lady Sillocks had an especial significance for her, an unpleasing significance. It was a cat-and-mouse scrutiny, a hostile fascination. Sanchia Sillocks was unusual. She had a restless, mordant brilliancy, wide nostrils and a voracious mouth. In age she was about seven and thirty, supple, vigorous, so sure of herself that she never paused to look in a mirror. She was a woman who could not sit still. The whole of her was sound and movement, like water eternally splashing against a wall. And as Ruth watched her eating olives and talking to Hazzard and Mr. Mack with an air of feverish finality she felt that she herself was a very small, crude, badly-educated creature in a fluffy pink frock, and that Lady Sillocks knew it and knew it so well that she would assume it as obvious.

Snatches of the conversation at the other end of the table drifted to Ruth like whiffs of cigar smoke. Lady Sillocks was giving her views. She had very complete views on many subjects, and as a matter of fact she did know about a great number of things. She was the self-ordained woman of affairs, with a mind like a Blue

book. Her voice was high-pitched and monotonous. It suggested the sounds made by some mechanism.

She was pushing questions at Ruth's husband.

"But you have to be very sure of your reactions, haven't you? What about your index? Koch made the disastrous mistake of assuming that you cooked up a culture and squirted in a dose——"

Ruth listened to what Hazzard would say. His voice came level and unhurried.

"Trial by error—sometimes—to begin with."

"But the public is not sympathetic towards trial by error."

"No. Possibly because it employs that method so much itself."

Lady Sillocks's blue eyes stared.

"Exactly. That's a very pertinent observation. But presumably in the case of a tuberculous child——"

The dinner continued; ice pudding and more conversation from the old soldier man on Ruth's left. Mr. Waterford Glass, having refused ice pudding, became argumentative towards his *vis-à-vis*. Lady Sillocks's high-pitched voice went on, but it appeared to have raised the whole table to vocal opposition, and the words were lost to Ruth. But what a remarkable woman, to be able to talk to Hazzard in his own language, and to cross-question him, and to argue with him! And Ruth, listening to old Graham, felt more and more like a schoolgirl, a raw young thing, stupendously ignorant and uninformed. She was thinking that Christopher had never talked to her quite as he appeared to be talking to Lady Sillocks.

She felt jealous, and just because jealousy is painful emotion she felt hurt. Her little flutter of success began to droop its wings.

"You should hear that woman on a platform," said the voice of the soldier.

"Does she make speeches?"

"Haven't you heard her?"

"No. I don't go out very much. I always seem to be so busy at home. Who—is—Lady Sillocks?"

The blue eyes twinkled.

"Now—you have asked me a question. She has the reputation of being one of the best beggars in London. And she educates everybody. She is one of those women with a remarkable sense of responsibility for other people's responsibilities."

Ruth looked slightly bemused.

"Yes, but who is she? I'm terribly ignorant."

"I believe her husband is something in shipping. He was knighted a few years ago. They have a house in Berkeley Square,

and a country place in Sussex. As far as I know, Sillocks spends his life visiting every golf course in England. His wife hunts."

"Can she ride, as well as do other things?"

"Not that sort of hunting, dear lady, other sorts of hunting."

IV

Afterwards they held a symposium; Mr. Mack used the word with a twist of the tongue; but Ruth remained in the background with her old soldier and two silent persons who sucked steadily at their cigars. In the very nature of things Ruth was made for backgrounds. She sat and looked and listened, and to her there were only three figures in the room, Mr. Mack, Lady Sillocks, and her husband.

Lady Sillocks had taken the inevitable chair by the fire; it was her fire. She began to make a speech to them in profile; she spoke with a mechanical fluency and with an assumption of supreme seriousness, but Ruth noticed that her eyes never changed their expression; there was no softening of their cold blue stare. She mesmerized people. She was so intense and well-informed and self-assured that she could be quite incredibly dull, and yet the world called her dullness inspired.

Mr. Mack's monocle fascinated Ruth. It was a sardonic, twinkling circle in his bleached face. It seemed to Ruth that Mr. Mack was wickedly and secretly amused at a woman sitting there and holding the room and addressing all these men as though they were small boys. Mr. Mack was rather like the ring-master at a circus, and Lady Sillocks was riding the white horse and cutting oratorical capers. She threw statistics instead of kisses.

Ruth's third figure was Hazzard's. He sat on the edge of his chair, leaning forward, his face very still and attentive, and it seemed to Ruth that Christopher was taking Lady Sillocks at her own valuation. She had mesmerized him. He looked like a boy listening to a tale of the South Seas.

V

Lady Sillocks was the first to leave. She shook hands with everybody, and with varying degrees of impressiveness.

To Hazzard she said, "I think this has been a great evening, Dr. Hazzard. We have had a glimpse of your promised land."

She looked curiously and coldly at that little person, Hazzard's wife, and extended to her the tips of perfunctory fingers. And then

she left all these men as though she were turning out a light and abandoning them to a desolate twilight.

Ruth noticed that some of the men looked at each other. Mr. Mack removed his monocle, threw the stump of a cigar into a fire, and lit another.

"Well, this has been a descent from Olympus."

Hazzard was standing staring at the fire as though he saw pictures in it, and his wife went up and touched his arm.

"I think we ought to be going, Chris."

He looked at her vaguely. She had interrupted his thoughts.

"Going? Not yet. We haven't finished."

But the other men were finished if Hazzard was not. The scheme had been dined upon, orated upon, discussed. An informal committee had been chosen to collect data. Lady Sillocks had promised to interest people. What more could you do but go to bed?

The drift set in towards the door, and Soames became busy with scarves and overcoats and hats, and at five-and-twenty minutes past eleven Ruth found herself walking round Russell Square with her husband. The stars hung in the tops of the trees, and in Ruth there was a little yearning to be touched and talked to, but Hazzard was up among the stars.

Suddenly he said, "That's a most remarkable woman."

And Ruth was mute, for Hazzard had used the word that the old soldier man had used, but not with the same meaning.

They reached the blue door, and Hazzard felt for his latch-key.

"We've interested her. It's a great beginning. That's the sort of woman who can get things done."

He opened the door and his wife went in. He was not conscious of her silence or of any significance it might contain. He had hardly looked at her the whole evening. He had been up in the conversational clouds with Lady Sillocks and his creative dreams.

Ruth felt dumb and hurt. She left him to close and bolt the door, and went upstairs to take off that pretty frock. However much the frock had succeeded she felt that she had failed.

Chapter Thirty-four

I

So these two potent personalities invaded Ruth's little world, Mr. Oswin Mack who needed something to play with, and Lady Sillocks who hunted reputation. Mr. Mack, declaring himself to be in his dotage, proposed to go out of the world in the act of making a *beau geste*. He would create a sanatorium for sick children just as he had created railways and steamship companies and the Imperial Hotel.

Lady Sillocks rallied to the idea because she had a passion for public affairs, and liked managing people, and getting up meetings and presiding on committees. Socially philanthropic enterprises were useful. They introduced you to so many notable people whom it was right and proper that you should know. Lady Sillocks was a fierce climber, and she had not yet arrived near the top of the ladder. Such an enterprise offered her opportunities to get her hands on another rung. It authorized her to go forth boldly and interest people in sick children, and to write letters and cadge introductions. It made her appear disinterested. She could claim the support of the Bishops. She could—quite correctly—go and call on the Duchess of Dorchester, and upon the Countess of Sligo, feeling herself armoured against rebuffs, because of the inspiration and the cause.

Also, all three of them, Oswin Mack, and the Lady and Hazzard believed in an intelligent autocracy. Mack, surveying life through his eye-glass, and talking to Hazzard, was fundamentally candid, which the world is not.

He would say, "I don't suppose there is any responsible professional man—lawyer, doctor, architect, who if pressed to reveal his true opinion, would not declare the democratic idea to be a ridiculous sham. What would science have to say? What could you say, doctor, when you know the things you do? People have to be led by the nose. At present the tendency is to grasp the proboscis with a silk handkerchief, and say, 'Excuse me, brother, but these are the Home Secretary's orders. Excuse me. This way, please.' The crowd has to be coerced until such a time as we all become super-intelligences, ideal anarchists, needing no notice-boards."

But Oswin Mack had one eye left for other people, which at that

season Hazzard had not. Ruth had known that her husband was capable of enthusiasms, but this one and only enthusiasm frightened her. For many years he had been scrambling up the side of his mountain, and the suddenness of the summit and the wind and the sense of space seemed to have upset his poise. With Hazzard it was not a case of personal inflation, but the inflation of an idea.

"I have offered them my mother's place at Melfont."

"The cottage?"

"Yes, as a nucleus. Other land could be got. Somehow there is a rightness about my giving it."

There was. And yet his generosity made her hold her breath, for it moved her to realize the fanatic in him, for if he could give that cottage to his sick children, he might give other things. She was frightened.

"I should like to have kept the cottage, Chris."

"Why? It's no use to us. Besides, I want to give something."

She said, "You have given so much; you have given years of your life. Isn't that sufficient?"

She felt that she would not grudge what he might give if he would let her share in the giving of it, but at the moment the Hazzard world was so full of Sanchia Sillocks. She was here and she was there. She appeared to be becoming more and more remarkable. She floated like a huge black cloud across Ruth's firmament.

Hazzard was always talking "Sillocks"; the Hospital for Sick Children had become a sort of Sillocks dolls' house; the proposed sanatorium was saturated with Sillocks. And Hazzard kept blurting out things that frightened and hurt his wife. Lady Sillocks was a superwoman; she had vision, and a genius for getting things done. She could use the social key; she had *nous;* she was educated.

Ruth heard all about Lady Sillocks's projected bazaar. Lady Sillocks proposed to hire the Stornway Hall, and get the whole of the West End interested. She proposed to have the bazaar opened by royalty.

Ruth winced and retreated. Her jealousy did not show itself, though it was more than jealousy; for it seemed to Ruth that at the happy, triumphant moment of her life this other woman had appeared and calmly possessed herself of the poor little cake at Ruth's party. Success had brought Sanchia Sillocks. Her effect upon Ruth was making Ruth feel like a shy child shut up in a cupboard. She could not compete with Lady Sillocks. She had begun to feel horribly inferior.

News came to her that the committee had gratefully refused

Hazzard's offer of his mother's cottage and garden. He brought her the news himself. He was not at all peeved at the refusal.

"The general opinion was that it is too far from town and too isolated."

Ruth was ready to agree with the hospital committee.

"Lady Sillocks suggests Surrey, pinewoods and sand. I think she is right."

Ruth could not restrain one little bitter cry.

"Lady Sillocks is always right."

Hazzard took her literally.

"She's remarkably right on most occasions. She has a genius for organization."

Ruth was mute, but her muteness was a sensitive veil. It had the silence of a fatal gentleness, and yet her very gentleness might be wiser than she knew. She stood on the dark edge of things and saw her man sailing out into strange, wide waters, and she let him go, and somehow chose to remain in the quiet, waiting wisdom of the home.

For, after all, the home was hers.

II

Old Mack, dropping in at five o'clock, found Ruth in her blue linen dress.

"Your husband out?"

She was sewing. She kept her eyes on her work. She had the air of a woman who had assumed that particular attitude and meant to remain in it. "Yes. Patients. There is so much influenza."

She had her grievance against Mr. Mack, and possibly Mr. Mack was not unaware of it. He had played the demi-god to these young people, but demi-gods may not see the whole of life, and even in mythology Olympus interfered disastrously with the loves of the humans. He had brought to No. 107 a garland of success and Lady Sillocks.

Possibly he had begun to focus his monocle on the picture. It was arguable that you could not treat humanistic phenomena as you treated a railway or an hotel. There were differences; there was woman.

He said, "About this bazaar."

He noticed that Ruth's head remained lowered. There was something purposeful and studied in the poise.

"Lady Sillocks's bazaar?"

"If you choose. Call it our bazaar. I have promised to be re-

sponsible for a stall. Not quite my job, and what do you think I'm responsible for?"

She went on sewing.

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Soap and scent and powder-puffs and manicure sets, and Rimmell, and Coty & Co. Well, will you take charge for me?"

There was a pause. Her needle went to and fro.

"No."

It was a gentle, but infinitely final No, and Mr. Mack looked perplexed. Perplexity with him was unusual.

"Oh, come, you'd do it very well."

She raised her head for a moment and looked at him.

"No. Thank you, I'd rather not. I mean it."

She did mean it, and he began to be conscious of her as a woman on a pedestal, set in a particular attitude.

Ruth continued to wear the blue linen dress; she wore it in the morning, and in the afternoon and after tea, and if ever a man were challenged to notice and reflect upon his wife's clothes Hazzard was that man. He did not appear to notice the blue dress; he was used to it; he was used to Ruth. Had she appeared naked or in a bead petticoat he would have been compelled to pause and consider.

Ruth was wearing the dress on the afternoon when Lady Sillocks called. She happened to be at the drawing-room window, and she saw the big closed car draw up outside the house, and a figure in furs emerge from it. Ruth felt chilled. Also she was aware of a sudden hardness. She went quickly down the stairs and intercepted Nellie who had come up to answer the bell.

"I'll answer it, Nellie."

She opened the door on Sanchia Sillocks. She offered her no recognition. She was in her uniform.

"Yes?"

"Surely, it is Mrs. Hazzard?"

"Yes."

"Is your husband in? I have a most important point to discuss."

"Dr. Hazzard is out. Can I take a message?"

Lady Sillocks's black eyebrows expressed not surprise, but an ironical interrogation. She had Ruth catalogued. It was a pity that some professional men married ten years too early, and married in Bloomsbury when they should have waited for marriage in Mayfair.

"No, I'm afraid not. Will Dr. Hazzard be long?"

"He is very busy."

"Oh,—I know. But how long?"

"I couldn't say."

Lady Sillocks thought "You little housemaid!" and smiled, and took charge of the situation.

"I'll come in and wait. It is rather important."

Ruth let her in and showed her into the dining-room and closed the door. She had reached the foot of the stairs when she heard Hazzard's key in the lock, and turned back to meet him.

"Chris, Lady Sillocks is in the dining-room."

It seemed to Ruth that her husband's eyes lit up.

"Has she been here long? Is there a fire?"

"No, only a minute."

He put his hat down on the hall table, and went at once and quickly into the dining-room, and closed the door upon his wife.

Ruth slowly ascended the stairs and sat down in her chair by the fire, and took up the book she had been reading, but on such occasions a woman's thoughts and feelings are stamped in black upon a consciousness of red or white. Ruth did not see the book in her lap. She was listening; but the act of listening was an effort of the imagination; for she could not hear the voices in the room below, Russell Square houses having solidity, and the traffic making a continuous noise without. But she listened; she imagined. It had never occurred to her to feel jealous of any of her husband's women patients, nor was she sexually jealous of Sanchia Sillocks. She was hurt and desolated by the idea of that other woman shut up intimately with Hazzard, talking to him as she—the wife—could not talk, listening to him and his projects. Ruth was jealous of the other woman's power, of her ambition, her cleverness, her knowledge of life and of things. Lady Sillocks was stealing Ruth's little secret, happy prides and tendernesses. She had felt that she had mattered; she had watched her plants growing, and here was this other woman supplanting her just when life was becoming so triumphant. Success had come, and it seemed to Ruth that she had ceased to matter. These other people mattered. They were the new, vivid, and potent figures in Hazzard's world. And she, obsessed by a horrible feeling of inferiority, belonged to his past.

Sitting there before the fire almost she wished herself back in Roper's Row, back in those dear days of struggle and obscurity. That funny old house had been hers, a corner of the world into which the Macks and Sillocks did not penetrate. And yet——? It was she who had placed the key of success in Hazzard's hand. Her thousand pounds had bought him his opportunity. She had prayed and dreamed and contrived. And this success that had

come so suddenly and so swiftly, what was it, a poison cup, a curse, exile for one of them? When a ship puts swiftly out into deep waters someone must be left behind.

She put the book aside and went down on her knees before the fire. She spread her hands to it. No, it couldn't be true. Surely she was exaggerating things. Her great man was still her great man. It was only that he was busy, preoccupied, full of other people's worries and his own ideals. He had waited so long for this success, and could she blame him if he clutched at it with both hands?

Her eyes filled with tears. No, she did not grudge him his success, but her dream had been broken, her dream of always standing beside him as his happy and proud comrade. For she had helped, she had helped in a hundred quiet and unobtrusive ways, as a wife helps, in cooking and contriving, and in sewing and smiling, and in loving him all the time. She had been gentle about it; she had not talked; she had sewed. She had darned socks while the Sillocks woman delivered orations.

It wasn't fair.

But she conquered those tears and stood up. She heard voices in the hall, and the closing of the front door. She heard the Sillocks car move off. She heard Hazzard coming up the stairs.

The whole of her rushed to him suddenly, and then held back. She remained motionless in the midst of that sense of movement. He came in and her eyes sought his face, the face which the other woman had looked at and talked to.

Hazzard did not glance directly at his wife. He crossed the room to the fire. He appeared preoccupied.

"Oh, Ruth, Lady Sillocks wants us to dine with her at Berkeley Square next Tuesday."

He made the statement as though it would be accepted without a question.

"Both of us, Chris?"

"Yes."

She looked at him, and he was far away from her. She had had one of those horrible flashes of intuition. She could hear Lady Sillocks saying as an after-thought, "Oh, yes, bring your little wife with you." And as a matter of fact that is what Sanchia Sillocks had said. Ruth's hands were clenched.

"Isn't she going to write to me?"

"Write? Why should she? Just an informal invitation."

He picked up Ruth's book, glanced at it, and put it down again.

"I can't go, Chris."

The lift of his head showed surprise.

"But you must. Why not?"
"I don't want to."
"But, my dear, why?"
"I won't go. I don't belong there."
He looked puzzled, annoyed.
"That's absurd. You'll have to write and explain."
"I shan't write. She didn't write to me."

III

Even misunderstandings are relative. A row in the Whitechapel Road may mean just nothing but beer and beef, and brute clawing its brute mate. Not that the Hazzards quarrelled. There was a silence between them, and some silences are more tragic than Greek wailing. Between two sensitive people a word once spoken may never be forgotten. In the rough and tumble of the ordinary mediocre marriage some illusions become as shabby as the furniture, but habit and necessity make useful stools, and if the plain man calls his mate a fool he is not breaking the wing of a bird. There is a certain brusque animalism that carries life on. Trampling a cabbage-bed is not like trampling a bed of flowers.

Now to Ruth that dinner at Lady Sillocks's represented a parting of the ways, a severing of the intimate nexus between her and Hazzard. She had refused to go, and now she waited and wondered whether he would go without her. She hoped and prayed that he would not.

Pathetic quibbling, sophistry! Not at all. Ruth had her reasons, or her feelings, and they were as real to her as the force and hurry of success were to Hazzard. Not that his head was becoming swollen. It was stuffed too full of ideas. His whole attention was fixed upon particular objectives, and he was unattentive towards his wife. Ruth was there; she was always there; she would always be there. Actually it did not occur to him that Ruth could be jealous of another woman's invasion of her secret prides, and that his wife was feeling like a child left behind while he went out to a party.

Nothing was said. He, for the moment, had lost his sense of perspective, and she stood on the edge of things and waited. Would he go? Did he understand her so little? Had he become so suddenly and disastrously a stranger?

She felt alone. Nor is there any loneliness like that which discovers itself alone in the very presence of that other intimate self. Hazzard had married a creature with the mentality of a child, but

during their years of marriage the child had matured into the woman. Such changes may occur insensibly.

He did not realize how he had hurt her, how suddenly insecure she had felt herself on the edge of this new world. She might be fearless for him, and timid and shrinking when he was not for her. His success was proving to be the most sensitive moment in their lives, and he did not understand her struggle, her sense of limitation, her feeling of a child among strangers. It seemed as though he had ceased to see the child in her, and had not discovered the wife.

He was full of his affairs. Ruth was just Ruth, a mirror, a voice, a presence, someone with whom you left a split glove to be mended or a bill to be paid. She had made his home life so smooth. She was at the back of his consciousness, but his consciousness had narrowed to the eye-piece of a microscope, and with all his eager attention fixed upon one object he remained unaware of the light that enveloped both man and microscope. Such unawareness, such a taking of the other soul for granted, such blindness of the emotions when pure intellect puts in the wings of Icarus, has been and always will be. Man wants God and money and woman, but he does not always want them or realize his need of them at one and the same time.

The silence continued. It seemed such a little silence, and such a small and incidental thing to be silent about, and yet Hazzard had spent ten years in observing the very little. He was on the top of the hill and still walking fast and fiercely, with his eyes taking in the increasing spaciousness of his success. It was not as though some little breathless figure panted along beside him. Love had stopped to wonder and to watch. He had left love behind him. He hurried, and talked as though love was still beside him. He had not noticed that he had left love behind.

On the particular day he did become aware of a muteness, a queer silence as of suspense.

"You'll come to-night, Ruth?"

He spoke kindly over the top of a visiting-book in which he was ticking off visits.

"I'd rather not, Chris."

"Aren't you feeling well?"

"Oh, yes."

He looked at her inquiringly.

"What's the matter, then?"

"Oh, nothing. I'd rather stay at home."

She should have blurted it out. Perhaps it would have been

better for them if she had blurted it out, but she was made voiceless by the feeling that he ought to have understood: "Don't you see? You are wanted; I am not. That woman thinks me a little, common, ignorant thing. Perhaps I am. But I love you, Chris, and I'm proud because I love you. I don't want to go where I am not wanted. I suppose it's selfish and absurd of me, but I don't want you to go where I am not wanted." But she did not say it, and he went on marking down his visits.

He said, "You will have to get used to success, Ruth. We have travelled far since Roper's Row."

She was silent. Success had become so much his that it was no longer hers. He was hurrying on. It was as though he called to her thoughtlessly over his shoulder, "Come along, my dear, don't dawdle. We have to catch the train. Come along."

IV

But she put out his dress-clothes for him, shirt, socks, collar, tie, coat, vest and trousers. She laid them ready on the bed, their bed, absurd, loving, sensitive creature, half conscious of her own absurdity, and wondering why Hazzard was not touched by it. She felt as though she were putting out his things for him before a journey from which he would never return. She felt herself little better than a servant.

But had she not begun by being his servant?

Yes, but so many years had gone by, and she had changed. She was the wife of Dr. Christopher Hazzard; she had educated herself in many ways. She was not the Ruth of Petter & Gom's. She had built up a pride in her job, though it was a woman's job, the doing of things which a man would not notice unless they were left undone.

Such service may create a simple philosophy of its own, and a habit of patience in dealing with the great and the little. She had laid out her husband's clothes, and carrying her self-assigned job to the very edge of thoroughness, she found his clothes-brush and brushed coat and trousers. He was going to dine in Berkeley Square.

She sat by the drawing-room fire while Hazzard dressed. She knew now that his going was inevitable; she accepted it. She had ceased to wonder whether she was being obstinate and foolish. She chose to stay at home.

He came in to her, carrying his overcoat and scarf.

"Is my tie all right, Ruthie? I'm not much good at ties."

She was up instantly, touched, made to feel that she mattered. He was going to dine with Lady Sillocks, but he came to her about his tie.

"No, Chris."

She retied it for him, with great care and some success, holding her breath, her eyes immensely serious.

"That's better."

"I wish you were coming, Ruth."

"Do you, Chris, really?"

"Of course."

He kissed her, and she clung to him for a moment.

"Oh, Chris, don't go right away from me into your great world."

"My dear," he said, "my dear," and looked at her with eyes of sudden attention; "don't think such things. You mustn't."

She touched his coat as though removing a thread from it. She was trembling.

"I'm so glad, Chris, it has come to you."

He was awake. He took her by the arms and held her.

"Tell me."

But she could not tell him. She could not say, "I spoilt success for you once. I am afraid. I'll not spoil it for you a second time."

"It's all right, Chris. I'd rather stay at home. You'll want a taxi. I'll go and whistle for one."

He held her.

"No, ring, and let Nellie whistle for one. And don't sit up, Ruthie; you are looking tired."

V

Later, a little mood of restlessness took possession of her. She went to the window and drawing the edge of the blind aside looked out into the square. It was one of those moist, still, winter nights, with the lights looking blurred and big and yellow, and the pavements and roadway glistening. She felt the lure of that London night. She went up and put on a hat and coat, and meeting no one slipped softly out into the square.

Her mood was in the past. She stood a moment, hesitating, looking up at the bare trees and the hundred lighted windows of the Imperial Hotel. She was reminded of the side door of Messrs. Petter & Gom's, and how she had stood on the pavement, hesitating, like some timid creature emerging suddenly into the light. A man passed and stared her in the face. Other memories rushed back.

She began to walk. She followed her Ariadne's thread of remembrance. The streets had a mystery; the houses seemed more tall, towering up into the dimness and losing themselves in the upper darkness. The pavements shimmered. She was both woman and child, with eyes that darted ripe and innocent glances into this world of matter suddenly become magical. She was the quintessence of consciousness, the woman creature, knowing things without knowing how she knew them. She was fey.

Fey and unafraid. Such and such things had happened; such and such things would happen. And she was unafraid. She seemed to put out her hands to touch the darkly shining curve of the future. She was sad and she was happy. Hidden life stirred in her.

She went through Red Lion Square. It was like a cracked and dark box creviced with light, and its lid was the night sky, but it was a box full of fantastic tricks. She came to the opening of Roper's Row and paused and stood at gaze. She was not Ruth, she was woman, selfless in being herself, most strangely aware of all the things that happened and could happen to woman.

She entered the Row. It seemed to her to be brighter and noisier than in the old days, but then life and London were growing brighter and noisier. She saw Roper's Row as a cleft in the mystery of London's vastness, a meretricious, flashy, cheap streak, like some scarf plastered with tin sequins. More flare, more noise, more voices. There were the same children, more children with their yelling, tinplate voices, and wet noses, and faces like household jam. Little raw creatures. And yet—— Yes, Roper's Row thrilled her; it was oozing with the strange juice of life. It was full of the fundamental smells and sweetness and slime.

She came to No. 7. It had become once more a shop. Its window steamed. It was a fried-fish shop, a frowsiness of women, and oil and chipped potatoes and smells and things wrapped up in bits of newspaper, and slimy footmarks on the boarded floor. She stood and gazed, and wondered at the incredible strangeness of reality, at civilization, at the fruits of the salt sea fried for God's pet puppet —man.

She turned away. She did not exclaim to herself, "How horrid, how disappointing!" She was strangely undisappointed. Roper's Row had a rightness of its own. It was just part of the mess man—in his hurry—makes of things. She thought of her own clean kitchen, and pleasant bedroom, and white linen, and a vase of flowers and of her man whose ideal was to alter the mess made by mediocre, muddling man. Hazzard wanted his world clean, just

as she liked her bathroom and her table silver clean. His vision was like Swiss sunlight.

And he had come to her for her to tie his tie.

VI

Meanwhile, Hazzard dined not far from the skirts of a bishop, and with a Lady This on one side of him, and old Mack's monocle gleaming across the table.

He did not know how characteristically Lady Sillocks had introduced him to her circle.

"Quite a fascinating little person. I've labelled him the Genius with a Bottle of Germs. Quite marvellous—in bits. Yes, a sort of little Pasteur. With a wife who has to be left at home."

Old Mack, ironic towards everything, because he had experienced and completed everything, observed Vulcan and Venus.

Or was it Minerva, the lady with the sacred Owl? How such women hooted! Tu-whit, tu-whoo. Yes, just hooted. Seraphic silliness, and shrill interferings. Of course there were women—— He nibbled burnt almonds and was amused. What did Hazzard make of the Sillocks woman? Couldn't he see her as a hotch-potch of hospital blankets and smoked salmon, and charity, and colloids, and eugenics, and duchesses, and periodicals, and flashlight photos, and *English Reviews*, and house parties, and politics, and cosmetics, and pearls and philosophy? What a jumble sale! and with that sniffing nose and little nibbling mouth! Hoot, hoot!

Hazzard walked home at half-past eleven. It had been a remarkable evening, he had been listened to when Lady Sillocks had allowed anybody to be listened to.

A remarkable evening, but remarkable women and evenings could be rather exhausting. He was a worker; he did things; he did not talk about what other people did. There was so much adventitious noise.

He came to Russell Square and the blue door, home, the place where he lived and worked. His wife would be upstairs, in bed, and perhaps peacefully sleeping. A pleasant idea. He would slip in beside her, and feel the gentle, intimate security of her presence.

He hung up his hat and coat, turned out the hall light and felt his way upstairs to their room. He opened the door softly, and saw that the gas was burning, but turned low. He left it low; he liked the dimness; Ruth was asleep.

But she stirred, she woke.

"Chris——"

"Sorry I've woken you up, Ruthie."

"Have you enjoyed yourself?"

"Oh, in a way, yes. They talk so hard."

And suddenly he went to her, and sitting on the edge of the bed, and bending down, put his face into the warm, soft fragrance that was woman.

"Glad to be back here, Ruthie."

"Oh, my dear."

Chapter Thirty-five

I

It was in January that Ruth began to be ill after the way of women.

At first she was a little frightened. She had not wanted a child; always she had been afraid of children for, like Hazzard, she had been tormented by other children when she was young, and the association of fear had remained. Her heart would go out to a puppy or a kitten, but in the presence of children she had felt a self-conscious shrinking, a too vivid awareness of that little, raw, round-eyed egotist. She had been ashamed of this shrinking; she had wondered whether she was abnormal, and what other women would say of her if they knew. Why was it that she could feel an impulse of tenderness towards a puppy or a kitten, and catch it up and caress it, and yet have no such feeling towards a child? Was it because other children had been cruel to her, and because she had not yet known motherhood in the flesh?

Also, Christopher Hazzard had opinions upon the conceiving and bearing of children, and they were opinions that were considered scandalous and decadent by the great majority of conventionalists in those years before the war. To Hazzard as a doctor the remedy had appeared so obvious. Too many children were born, especially the unwanted and the unfit children. He had written articles on the subject, but had found that no one was sufficiently frank to publish them. One serious journal had indeed dared to publish a letter from him, and it had produced such outpourings of abuse and sentimental condemnation that he had shrugged his shoulders and left the riddle of the Sphinx to be repropounded ten years later.

The clamour was characterized by such phrases as "Leave God and nature alone."—"Look at France."—"I prefer the commonsense of the plain working-man to the meddlings of cranks and faddists." Exactly, and Hazzard had written down a number of questions, and had asked the Editor of the serious journal to put them to his readers, but the Editor, who was a little scared, had declared the matter closed.

Hazzard's questions had run as follows:

Does man leave nature alone? Is not our civilization a perpetual interference with nature—so-called?

How many births are desired and planned?

How many children are the mere products of casual lust?

When two people can afford to rear and educate one or two children decently, does it still remain their duty to have six or ten?

What is the number of mentally defective children, potentially tuberculous children, syphilitic children born in London yearly? Will my critics collect these figures and ponder them?

What—exactly—is the commonsense of the great working class?

Have any of my critics studied this virtue in action in any London slum?

How is it that as a working-man's intelligence increases the size of his family decreases?

When this country possesses—as it will come to possess in the not very distant future—a million or so unemployed unemployables is our ideal still to be a family of ten?

Are we to follow Bernard Shaw or the codfish?

But this was merely controversial matter, and largely obsolete, for the plain man would begin to tackle the problem in his own practical way, and Hazzard was a practical man. He observed phenomena and their sequences, and the association of sequences which we call cause and effect, but when his own child was conceived it became the child of all time. It was the child of yesterday and to-morrow. It was his mother and his father and himself and Ruth and Ruth's parents, and a fragment of all those who had gone before. It was a mysterious mingling of chromosomes, of factors, also it would be Russell Square and not Roper's Row. That was important. It would not be the product of septic ignorance and feckless poverty.

But it was his child and Ruth's.

And in the conceiving of it Ruth was born for him anew.

She was the same Ruth and yet different. He had not thought to have a child; they had been too poor and too occupied with the struggles of professional life to plan for children. There are certain men whose lives are set apart from the child idea, men who should not be wasted upon children, and it is possible that Christopher Hazzard was such a man. The creators and the searchers have other work to do. But now the thing had happened, and he found himself feeling towards Ruth in a different way. He came more and more out of that inner chamber of his preoccupied self, and was man to her woman. He became kinder, more gentle. He was more conscious of life as a personal and human affair.

"I want Sir Berkeley Chisholm to see you, Ruthie."

"Is it necessary, Chris? It's only the sickness."

"Yes, that's normal. But I want an expert to examine you, and keep you under observation. I should not be satisfied with anything less."

She understood. She was tranquil, happy. She was resting by the fire, and he had sat down on a footstool beside her. He had gone away and he had come back. The abstracted, busy stranger of the last twelve months was disappearing. Man is this, and man is that, but to Ruth man had returned.

"You mustn't worry, Chris."

"I'm not worrying. I am only making everything as sure as skill can make it."

"Dear."

She put out a hand and ruffled his hair, and the new man who was Hazzard seemed to like it. He drew the footstool in close to the sofa, and his face had a soft thoughtfulness, and the haste in him seemed stilled.

He said, "You never know how you are going to feel about a thing until it happens."

She was smooth and secure, lying there before the fire with her husband's head close to her shoulder. She had not heard him mention the Sillocks' world since the new life had dawned in her. She felt strangely secure. She believed that he might have talked all day about the Sillocks' world and she would not have minded. She was something apart, and he was most mysteriously yet really hers. She knew it. She wondered why she had worried.

So, Sir Berkeley Chisholm came to see Mrs. Hazzard, and found her a normal and healthy young woman.

"Nothing to worry about, Hazzard. Everything is as normal as it could be."

"Pelvis all right?"

"Perfectly. I'll call and see your wife once a month. Or perhaps she will come and see me."

"Thanks. I shall be very grateful to you. And you will see her through? I know it is asking a good deal."

"I'll see the little lady through."

II

About this time Hazzard's scheme of life became a circle instead of a figure with jagged edges, the globe instead of the jigsaw puzzle, satisfying and shapely. His practice was spreading; he had reached the spaciousness of Portland Place and was preparing to

cross it; he was making money at the rate of about two thousand pounds a year.

Lady Sillocks had referred to him as her "Little Genius with a Bottle of Germs." He was the vaccine man. He had emerged from the pharmacopœia. He had leisure to retire into that beloved lab.; he had time to be thorough, to disentangle realities, to hunt for causation instead of fobbing off the world with some mess in a bottle. He had fought tooth and nail for this thoroughness; it was his.

Yet, this success was not wholly his; he owed it to Ruth, to the wife who had effaced herself and had no life of her own, and who was happy while she gave. It was she who had supplied that last draught of courage; it was Ruth who had rescued him from Roper's Row.

For a little while he had been made myopic by success, but that short-sightedness was passing. He began to see more deeply and more distantly.

Behind Ruth he saw his mother, another woman who had sacrificed herself in order that her man child might become man.

Remarkable women! Slave women, unemancipated women! Yet how tenderly triumphant.

Was feeling seeing? How was it that he felt and saw so differently, and was astonished at the cold scrutinies of yesterday? He saw his sick children differently; he seemed to see in them the face of his own unborn child. His passion to heal and to help was an urge of the heart as well as of the brain.

Ruth was teaching him by loving him, and perhaps that is the way in which all good women have taught their men, when they love as Ruth and Mary Hazzard loved.

As for that other flower, the Sanatorium for Sick Children, it was a bud preparing to open. Mr. Oswin Mack had put down fifty thousand pounds; the Sillocks' world was interested; the committee in action. They had travelled so far as the selection of a possible site at Wrensham in Surrey, and were negotiating for the purchase of land; they had selected an architect, and this gentleman was preparing plans and estimates.

In April Lady Sillocks's bazaar was to make the Marylebone Hospital for Sick Children and its country cousin fashionable.

Hazzard dined out quite a great deal these days. He should have had plenty of practice at tying dress ties, but he went to Ruth for the tying of them. He did not try to persuade her to go to these dinners, she carried precious cargo; later—they would sail in company.

He said to her:

"I don't like going to these shows alone. I want you with me."

"But you enjoy yourself, Chris."

He reflected.

"But do I? The fact is—I'm not much of a talker. I get bored with talkers. I'd much rather be at work in my lab., or here in front of the fire."

"I don't think I'm much of a talker either, Chris. Those big people frighten me—rather."

"Frighten you? They needn't. Look here, Ruthie, when you are well again we'll decide to dine out once a month. You and I."

"Perhaps we might."

For Hazzard was beginning to find Sanchia Sillocks a little ennuyant; one does not find people out until they begin to be boring. Lady Sillocks ran a menagerie; she liked to collect strange animals and show them off, but when they had ceased to be strange and interesting they were dismissed to the social abattoir. She collected celebrities—musical people, political people, anything in trousers that had tricks. She would lay hold of a pianist, some poor, struggling devil, and give him a glass of lemonade and some sandwiches and sit him down at her piano to play to her crowd. It advertised him. And she would allow him his applause.

"Perfectly marvellous."

She used all sorts of people in quite different ways. Some were ladders, others footstools; the majority might be regarded as stage properties. She had to be rushing about everywhere, energizing, organizing, lecturing, reminding the world of its responsibilities. There were men who understood why Sillocks was a golf maniac, and went from Rye to Hoylake, and from Westward Ho to St. Andrews, smiting a rubber-cored ball.

In April Lady Sillocks's Hospital Bazaar arrived like a cyclone. Half the nursing staff were to assist in uniform; the medical staff were to carry out the duty of shopwalkers. And Lady Sillocks had an idea; she wanted a corner of the Stornway Hall screened off and made to look like a section of a hospital ward. She wanted real children in the cots, real children from one of the wards. She said it would "Give value."

There was a breeze. Hazzard objected, and was backed by two or three of his confrères, and Lady Sillocks lost her temper. She could not be opposed. She talked hard and fast for her idea, but the committee had to tactfully execute and bury it.

Hazzard went home and described the fracas to his wife.

"She wanted to put the children in a pen like a lot of little prize pigs at a show. I wasn't having any."

Ruth looked wise.

"It's so much her show, Chris."

"It's too much her show. She tries to dominate everything and everybody. Old Mack had to play the strong man. The fact is, Ruthie, I'm getting just a little tired of the lady."

He was to be more tired of her before the first day of the Bazaar came to an end. It was to be a two-day affair. It was opened by Royalty; Lady Sillocks acted as an intermediary between the great person and the chorus. She was all smiles, glittering like a peripatetic, undulating iceberg; she presented people; she made little speeches.

She took Hazzard in tow; one of the senior physicians had to be in tow; she led him round like a monkey on the end of a string. He was supposed to chatter professionally, learnedly. She fixed him with a Minerva eye. Almost she watched him as though the monkey might forget—and scratch itself. She turned the handle of the organ fast and furiously.

Hazzard caught the sardonic stare of old Mack's monocle. Old Mack was there for the solemn hour, propping himself on a couple of sticks. He was amused. He could observe Hazzard's reactions at the end of the string. A remarkable woman!

But Hazzard broke the string. He was sufficiently male to react. He detached himself and went across to Mr. Mack's stall, which was presided over by a very pretty little person who had a sense of humour. He bought scent, bath salts, and a manicure set for his wife.

III

Mr. Oswin Mack sent flowers twice a week to No. 107 Russell Square, and on occasions he and his flowers arrived together, Soames carrying the one and helping the other. For Mr. Mack's world had become a window and a chair. He made an excellent chairman, and as for sitting at a window and watching life, he found it amusing. Lady Sillocks amused him, and Hazzard's passing belief in the Sillocks' splendour, and Ruth's staying at home. Mr. Mack had a collection of apothegms, and one of them was, "A woman is never so remarkable as when she is about to become a mother." He was amused. Lady Sillocks's pregnancies had all been on paper; she could give you the birth statistics of half a dozen countries, but she had not produced a baby. A very crude test applied by one of those vulgar fellows who had seen life as an affair of blood and sap and soil. To old Mack there was a sort of resemblance between Sanchia Sillocks and a chorus girl;

one showed her legs, the other her logic, and that was about all there was to it. And you were expected to pay for both exhibitions.

Mr. Mack had a taste for reality. He could afford to be real and to say real things. He said them to all sorts of people, including the sedulous, well-soaped, efficient Soames.

"Soames, I shall pay you five hundred a year while I am alive."

"Very generous of you, sir."

"Wait one moment, Soames. I am leaving you just fifty pounds and my case of razors in my will. So—consider."

Soames smiled his soapy smile.

"I hope you will live many years, sir."

"Exactly."

To Mr. Mack Hazzard and his wife were real people, neither social dummies nor slaves. They amused and interested him. He was attracted by Ruth's personal perfume, odours of the still room, and the lavender sachet and the rose-bowl. She was supposed to be out of date; but would such a woman ever be out of date, a woman who solved the sex problem and the marriage problem by living them instead of writing about them and spouting about them? The tyranny of the male! Hazzard was one of the tyrants, and his little wife sat at home and held him at the end of her invisible thread. Man may be a fanatical worker; he may work his fourteen hours a day if he is not democratic and decadent; but the more fiercely a man works, the more he needs a home. Mr. Mack had employed housekeepers and valets; he had never employed a wife. Temperamentally he had been too adventurous.

But he did allow that man had dominated the show a little too obtusely. When he argued the matter with a woman of the world he allowed her the point.

"Yes, dear lady, you have every right to that particular sort of future. You say that man has wilfully made woman either a sentimental fool or a harlot. But has he? Do we do any of these things consciously? Life is a complex of urges. It is rather like mixing sugar and water. Of course you can withdraw the sugar, or replace it with acid."

He was told, and quite rightly, that the woman of the future would demand an intelligent life of her own, and he would flourish his monocle and reply:

"Why—of course. Be as intelligent as ever you can. But what is a life of one's own? Some women may continue to feel that a life of one's own is a life lived with a man. I don't know. I don't take to the insect ideal."

But Ruth interested him. She was so primeval. She was the other extreme to Sanchia Sillocks. To her man was man; to the other woman men were rather like a collection of monkeys.

And was it possible that the masculine woman of the future would produce a kind of domesticated male monkey who would perch at home and stir the porridge?

Or would there be man, woman and neuter?

Mr. Mack's great argument was interaction. You got nothing without interaction, friction, chemical interplay, transformation of energy, call it what you pleased. Sex was interaction; marriage was the quintessence of interaction. There was always something of the fool in the man or woman who had lacked adequate social experience, and sex is the chief social experience.

He insisted on reality. He mistrusted theorists, especially the social theorists. Let them build their Jericho. Life blows a trumpet, and the walls fall flat.

IV

He observed Ruth making baby clothes, and he did not even wonder if she liked it. Of course she liked it. She had the wisdom of the realities.

But that was a monstrous argument to use, mush, the pretty-pretty, a kitten-faced sentimentality, Marcus Stone.

He said, "Your husband gets busier and busier."

She agreed.

"But he loves it."

What a saying! So she did realize.

"And how do you like success?"

She held up the particular and absurd garment.

"It rather frightened me."

"Indeed?"

"But not now. You see, I didn't quite realize that to a man like Chris the job was the same as success."

Mr. Mack could not help being mischievous.

"Not Sillocks and society—so-called."

She smiled a slow, thoughtful smile.

"Yes. And I'm part of the job, Mr. Mack."

"Exactly."

V

To Hazzard came one of those moments when success is very satisfying. Among his morning letters he found one from a doctor in Hampstead explaining that a child was ill, and that a consult-

ant had been called in, but that the parents were not satisfied. They wished Dr. Hazzard to see the child. And would Dr. Hazzard ring up and appoint an hour, and he—the G.P.—would try to arrange for the other physician to be present. He gave the name of the Harley Street man; it was old Sir Dighton Fanshawe.

Hazzard rang up the G.P. and took a taxi to Hampstead. The house was in Judge's Walk. He saw Fanshawe's car waiting, and he could picture that old white leopard silking up and down in a polite and restrained rage. He was surprised that the great man had deigned to meet him.

And so they met over the body of a sick child, and old Fanshawe, treating Hazzard as though he had never met him in his life before, was icy and urbane. He was sufficiently a man of the world to refuse the offence. Of course, if these people, who were rather newly rich, insisted on calling in this outsider——!

They consulted. Hazzard agreed with Sir Dighton's diagnosis, but he did not agree with the treatment which the great man suggested. He said so, quietly and confidently, and the impasse became serious. It had to be carried down to the drawing-room to be exhibited to the mother and father of the child. Old Fanshawe stood on the hearthrug, warming his dignity and looking like Gladstone facing the crudities of a Tory opposition.

It was an awkward occasion, and the G.P. remained in a chair by the door, looking bothered and unhappy.

Sir Dighton was for giving the child something in a bottle; Hazzard talked bacteriology. This uncomfortable professional disagreement was explained to the father, a thick-set, downright Yorkshireman who stood and summed up the two men as well as their methods.

"Well, gentlemen, you've put me in a rather awkward position."

He stuffed his fists into his pockets.

"I'm a plain man. Seems to me it's not much use pouring sugar and water down a rat-hole to eliminate the rats. Seems to me Dr. Hazzard's idea gets down to business."

Old Fanshawe's scalp grew pink. He looked at the ceiling, and then walked slowly towards the door.

"Ah, indeed. Then—obviously, I leave the case to Dr. Hazzard. I will wish you good morning."

And he went.

Chapter Thirty-six

I

Said Ruth in May, "Chris, I should like to go down to the cottage for a few days."

She supposed that he was too busy to go with her to Melfont, but there are occasions when man is dawn or sunset instead of noon, and in May Melfont was green with growth and with memories.

"I can manage the week-end. I'll take you down."

So it was settled, and Mr. Oswin Mack lent them the biggest of his three cars and the use of a chauffeur, and Mrs. Tribute lit fires, and the weather was merciful.

At Melfont the fruit blossom had fallen, but the old thorn-trees were white, and from the polished and pointed bronze of the beech-buds infinite greenness had unfolded itself. Old Sisbury's skull-cap had lost its winter rustiness. Blackbirds sang. Once more the earth was full of a sad, sweet strangeness.

Melfont observed the size of the Mack motor-car. Having in its nice, neighbourly fashion prophesied failure for that little lame fellow, it felt huffed, but was encouraged when it heard that the car was a borrowed one. So Mary Hazzard's son could still be patronized, if not by Melfont, by some other person.

Mrs. Prosser, fatter and redder than ever, and overtaken in her waddlings by that very impressive vehicle, hurried on to see who should get out of the car. She saw Hazzard and the chauffeur and Ruth, and Sarah Tribute solicitous as an old clucking hen. Mrs. Prosser had a midwife's eye.

Going to church on the Sunday, Mrs. Prosser looked over the cottage gate, and saw the young woman in a deck-chair under one of the apple-trees, with her feet on a footstool and a rug over her legs. Hazzard was sitting in another chair, reading, and Mrs. Prosser paused and addressed him.

"So you don't go to church these days, Chris Hazzard."

Hazzard looked up and across at her.

"Good morning, Mrs. Prosser."

And he went on reading.

There are silences and silences, and Mrs. Prosser, knowing exactly what Hazzard's silence said, and finding no other stone to

throw, waddled on as far as Mrs. Tribute's cottage. You could say things on a Sunday morning to Sarah, even though Sarah said them back at you. Mrs. Prosser liked saying things; she rooted; she had never been ringed.

"I reckon 'e don't visit his mother's grave these days. All she did for him, and no stone put up. Mean and scand'lous I call it."

Sarah knew her Prosser.

"You're wrong. He was down there before breakfast. Some people don't need headstones."

"So you think! That young woman of his is going to have a baby."

"Do you find that scandalous, Jane Prosser? You've had 'em by the hundredweight."

"And fine, healthy babies, too. She don't look like the sort of girl to have a healthy baby."

"We aren't all made the same. Lobsters and lilies, Jane. And boiled lobsters. Mind, or ye'll be late for service. I doubt whether the Lord God could get on without 'ee."

You could thwack Mrs. Prosser, and she would grunt, and waddle on to the next interesting mess and resume her rootings.

After tea Hazzard climbed Sisbury, and though it was Sunday he had Sisbury to himself. Sisbury was too candid and unconcealing for lovers. He sat down with his back to the stone, and watched the shadow of Sisbury steal slowly, like a man in a hood, across the river valley. Where the shadow fell the green of grass and leaves grew darker. It fell across Mary Hazzard's cottage, but left one corner of the garden in full sunlight, and Ruth's chair was in that patch of sunlight.

Hazzard smiled. Was it an omen? But assuredly Ruth belonged to the old heliolithic people. She had something of the south in eyes, hair, temperament; she did not belong to the cold, grey, careful north. Strange business—heredity. He was quite sure that he belonged to the "Barrow" folk. And what would their child be like? He could not get used to the idea that he was to be a father. It seemed only yesterday—— And he did not feel parental. Up on Sisbury he felt himself the son of his mother, quite a little fellow still, very much aware of the vastness and the strangeness of life. In the old days, racing down the hillside on his little legs, he had hurried home to his mother as to a live presence, a bosom, a voice; for Sisbury could be a hill of ghosts, and on this May evening he had the same feeling of strangeness. The shadowy dead crowded round you and listened. Almost you could hear them brushing

against the grey stones. The dead pressed upon you, crowded to see live man and his child.

A little shiver passed through Hazzard.

He got up and went down to his wife just as in the old days he had returned to his mother.

II

As Mrs. Prosser had observed, Hazzard had put up no headstone to his mother, "Here lies Mary Hazzard," but during those summer days Mary was with her son in the spirit, because of Ruth and Ruth's child. As for that other Christian Prosser observation, that Ruth did not look the sort of woman to produce a healthy baby, all the biological indications were otherwise. She was carrying her child successfully; she looked well, she slept well. Once a month she went to see Sir Berkeley and was examined by him, and Sir Berkeley found her condition normal.

He could say to Hazzard, "There ought to be no trouble, no trouble at all."

So far, so good. It was a summer of much sunshine, and Ruth passed much of her time sitting out in the Russell Square gardens under the shade of a plane-tree. She had no quarrel with life, for life was fuller and richer than she had ever known it, flesh of her flesh and spirit of her spirit.

She had no qualms. She was far less anxious than Hazzard was. He was bringing her much happiness during those summer days because he was bringing her himself. She possessed him; she held the end of her vital thread; when he went out to his work she had no feeling of being left, because of the way in which he returned to her. She was the first cause. Returning, he would come straight to her, whether she was out in the garden or in the drawing-room. His eyes looked at her attentively, devotedly. She knew herself to be watched as some precious thing is watched, and the knowledge abode in her like a child.

He was developing particular and significant gestures. Always he would come and stand beside her and put out a hand and touch her hair. The touch was very personal. It suggested that he wanted to touch her so as to assure himself of her reality and her aliveness, to be able to feel "This is my beloved; she is here; always she will be here. Why should I feel afraid?"

For he was afraid. Success had come to him; it appeared solid and sure, and yet the old fear lay behind it, the menace of uncontrollable circumstance, fog, the unknown. He had known so much

struggle, so much hostility, and always he had felt the need of armour. He had gone armed against prejudice.

On Sisbury Hill he had had that feeling of aloneness, primeval man on a hilltop under a vast sky, looking out under alert, fierce brows for the possible enemy, beast or man. For years he had been conscious of life as a menace, as an ironic force smashing and trampling. All through the ages man has striven and planned to divert or control this menace.

The sun shone. Money was coming in. His practice was increasing. Ruth was a healthy young woman. And yet he was a little afraid. There seemed so much sunlight and so much stillness that he began to mistrust the very serenity of the atmosphere. Circumstance was so treacherous, and he wanted to feel sure. But was one ever sure? Was it good for man that he should feel sure? Did not your very happiness and the figure of the woman whom you loved cast shadows?

His wife slept well; Hazzard slept less well.

He would lie awake, pretending to be asleep. Or he would wake suddenly with a sense of listening for something. Her breathing? Yes, he would lie and listen to Ruth's breathing, and sometimes he would put out a cautious hand and touch her very gently. He did not want to wake her. She was there; she was breathing.

Absurd alarmist! He could call himself that. He supposed that he was the worrying sort, and that he would always find the fly in his amber. But provided the fly remained a dead and encysted fly, he would be eternally fooled by his own imaginings.

He began to feel like a doting small boy towards Sir Berkeley Chisholm. Chisholm was a great man; Chisholm was safe, he was the safest man in London. Ruth would be all right with Chisholm. Of course she would be all right.

Happening to be called one evening to a case in Bedford Place, he chose to go by way of Roper's Row. He was astonished at its narrowness, or at his own sense of its narrowness. He loitered outside No. 7. He looked up at the familiar, memorable windows. He seemed to be looking at himself, at his mother, at Ruth. And now No. 7 was a fried-fish shop.

Did it feel it? Were houses persons?

And suddenly he was startled. He heard a voice singing, and it seemed to come to him out of the past. It bawled that old, cynical, shabby refrain:

> "Nothing to do but die, nothing to do but die.
> When you've come to the end of your days
> There's nothing to do but die."

Hazzard walked on with a stiff face.

"Damn the fellow; he ought to have been dead years ago."

III

The Sillocks' world went to Scotland. The season was over, and so was Hazzard's Sillocks season, though he had traversed it without so much as suspecting that Ruth had been jealous of Sanchia Sillocks. Mr. Mack remained in London, and London sufficed him.

"My dear sir, what's the use of my trying to run away on legs like mine?"

Moreover, Mr. Mack was interested in this Sick Children business. In a sense he had made himself responsible, and the burden was on his shoulders; nor did he feel completely Mr. Mack without some weight upon his shoulders, and especially a weight that would have squashed most mortal men. His idea had been to go out of the world as a Samson, either pulling down or building up, and circumstance seemed to will it that he should die constructing.

"And not a bad gesture either, doctor. I sit up here and look down at the world rather like the three-dimensional gentlemen who visited the two-dimensional world in 'Flatland.' After all, our world is a sort of Flatland for the crowd."

Said Hazzard, "To me consciousness is the intruding edge of the fourth dimension. And the only thing worth while about consciousness is that it should be yours."

"To do with it as you please?"

"To be able to look at what you please, without some interfering scoundrel of a tax-gatherer or a lawyer pulling you by the coat-tails."

"Anarchy, my lad, the law unto yourself."

"Why, of course. That's the only law fit for the wise, but your neighbour feels outraged if you say so."

"Because, my dear doctor, he thinks himself the one wise man. It's always the other fellow who is the fool."

But land had been bought in Surrey on the Hampshire and Berkshire borders; the chosen architect had had his plans accepted, and builders and contractors were submitting estimates, and one day late in August Mr. Mack sent a note across to No. 107.

"I am going to drive down to Wrensham and look at the site. If you can spare an afternoon, come."

Hazzard went with Mr. Mack, and Mr. Mack's chauffeur had orders to go by way of Hindhead, and to pull up above the Devil's

Punch Bowl. Mr. Mack liked high ground as much as he liked to be at the top of a high building, and he stood up in the open car, steadying himself with his hands on the back of the front seat. He had the Viking look, the long-sighted hawk's stare of the ship-master or climber.

"Wonderful country this England. Wonder how much will be left of it in twenty years. A kind of fly-paper."

Resuming his seat, he looked roguishly at Hazzard.

"Remember, doctor, a murder is always more important than a poem. That's the English way, and yet we are not bad sort of people. Personally, I prefer poetry in action."

They drove on past the newly erupting rednesses, the country Londoner's latest form of self-expression in domestic architecture, and Mr. Mack remarked upon the structures and their essential silliness.

"Glad we tied our fellow down to something simple, grey and white, with touches of black here and there. He wanted to perpetrate another red pimple."

At Wrensham there was stillness and sunlight and the smell of the pines. Oswin Mack remained in the car half-way down the sandy lane that gave access to the new site. Hazzard got out and wandered. He found a solitude of Scotch pine and bracken and heather, with little carpets of vivid grass spread here and there and kept like velvet by nibbling rabbits. He looked over rolling gorse and delicate birch-trees to blue distances. Solitude, the towering trees, the crowded gloom in among the tall straight trunks, shafts of sunlight slanting through, the resinous pungency of the pines, the stillness, the secrecy, the heat.

The landscape shimmered. He strolled on, and suddenly he saw a sheet as of rose-coloured flame burning in the blue gloom of the pinewood. He stood and gazed. This rapture of colour was the greater willow-herb in flower, masses and masses of it, licking the dark boles of the trees. And he thought that never had he seen anything more beautiful, more mysterious, more satisfying.

And then another thought came to him.

"I wish Ruth could see this."

The softness of those flaming flowers was—somehow—Ruth to him, secret, concealed, to be discovered only by the solitary searcher. Poor little Ruth. He felt poignant, very much and suddenly alone. It was absurd how much alone you could feel with that other half less than forty miles away.

Yes, but why feel troubled and afraid? Ruth would be all right; of course she would be all right.

Chapter Thirty-seven

I

A SEPTEMBER night, with the stars shining, and the plane-trees in the Square floating like flocculent dark clouds across the brilliant firmament of the Imperial Hotel.

Hazzard, sitting in the drawing-room with the door ajar, heard a voice calling him.

"Dr. Hazzard."

It was the voice of the nurse who had come out from Ruth's room and was standing at the top of the second flight of stairs. And Hazzard went quickly out on to the landing. His face had a pinched look.

"Yes."

"I think it is time we sent for Sir Berkeley."

"I'll take a taxi."

He hurried out. The night was warm and soft, but to Hazzard the night was nothing but a shadowy question-mark, a passing from this to that, so many hours of slow suspense. There were taxis waiting on the rank, and he got into one and gave Chisholm's address.

"As quickly as you can."

He sat on the edge of the seat. He was a little frightened, and feeling within himself compassion that quivered like sensitive, torn flesh, for an hour ago he had crept up the stairs and stood listening outside Ruth's door. He had heard a little moaning, and then a quick and half-smothered cry.

He found Chisholm post-prandially beneficent and buxom, and finishing a cigar. It is possible that Chisholm was faintly amused by Hazzard's worried face; he had seen so many worried faces, and when worry was natural but superfluous. Mrs. Hazzard was a normal and healthy young woman.

"I have a taxi waiting."

Sir Berkeley gently smiled at him.

"Have a cigar, Hazzard."

"Thanks, but I don't feel like smoking."

How alike men were on these occasions, and yet alike with a difference. Some smoked like furious, sooty chimneys; others had no stomach for the weed.

They drove to Russell Square, and Hazzard paid the taxi-driver and carried up the great man's bag. He did not quarrel with the feeling that Sir Berkeley was showing a magnanimous and gracious condescension in personally conducting Ruth through her first confinement. For the moment Sir Berkeley was the greatest man in London, and almost Hazzard was ready to fawn upon him.

The nurse met them on the stairs.

"Mrs. Hazzard would like to see you, sir."

Chisholm nodded. He went on and up with his air of debonair and confident solidity, and Hazzard drifted into the drawing-room, and sat down and stood up again and walked about and listened. He was all ears. He pulled up a blind and looked out into the Square, and pulled the blind down again. The act suddenly suggested the significance of the lowering of blinds. But how absurd! He had brought hundreds of children into the world, and had never had a death. But then Ruth was different from all other women.

He heard the closing of a door and Chisholm's footsteps on the stairs. He stood in the middle of the room, tense, breathless. He looked at Chisholm's face as he entered.

"Going on perfectly, Hazzard. Your wife would like to see you just for one moment."

Hazzard went limping up the stairs. Yes, he wanted to see his wife just for that one moment, to touch her, to assure himself that Ruth was Ruth. He slipped softly into the room. He saw Ruth, and the bed, and the nurse sitting by the window. It was all misty, yet vivid. He felt most strangely moved.

And his wife smiled at him.

"I'm quite all right, Chris. Sir Berkeley says it won't be long."

He went quickly to the bed, and bent down and kissed her forehead. It was moist and flushed, but he was surprised at her courage and her calmness.

"God keep you, my darling."

She smiled again, and then the smile suddenly faded. Her eyes assumed that look of apprehension. The birth-pangs were returning.

"Go and wait, Chris dear."

He understood. Again he kissed her forehead, and stole away without a backward glance, feeling that he was leaving a part of himself in the room with Ruth. How damnably helpless you were on occasions. Life had to have its way.

He found Sir Berkeley very much at his ease in Ruth's particular chair, and reading an evening paper.

"Plenty of pluck up there, Hazzard."

Hazzard walked to and fro, glancing at the back of Chisholm's solid head.

"She's perfectly wonderful."

But wasn't Chisholm going up? He wanted Chisholm in that room, and the great man was blandly perusing that perfectly fatuous paper. News! There was no news.

"Another heroine chained to the House railings. Well, I rather prefer that bedroom courage."

Hazzard fidgeted behind him.

"Everything's quite all right?"

"Absolutely! It ought to be over in another hour or so."

II

Eleven o'clock.

Hazzard was sitting with the door open. He had heard one of the maids creep up the stairs to bed, but Elizabeth was awake and on duty in the kitchen. Elizabeth took herself and life very seriously.

The house was very still. The traffic in the Square had dwindled to the passing of an occasional desultory taxi, but to Hazzard the stillness was the almost noiseless passing of a diminishing suspense. He accepted the silence as blessed; in that upper room things were happening according to nature; soon it would be over. Perhaps it was over. He would hear Chisholm coming down the stairs with the solidity and the deliberation of success; he would see Chisholm's buxom face smiling at him with kindly amusement.

"Everything all right, Hazzard; it's a boy."

That is how it would happen. That is how Hazzard had seen it happen hundreds of times in other houses and to other husbands and wives, only he had been in Chisholm's place. Well, no doubt it was good for a man to get his experience on both sides of the curtain, both as actor and audience. It taught you to understand. And he kept glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece, and listening for the opening of a door. Surely the business should be over?

Gradually his feeling of fear returned, and the stillness became the silence of apprehension. He got up and walked about the room from side to side, from fireplace to door. Chisholm had been up there more than two hours, and Chisholm had said the child

would be born in an hour. Of course such anticipation was approximate, but Sir Berkeley's experience was unique. Had anything gone wrong? But what could go wrong?

Hazzard's restlessness increased. He went out on to the landing and listened. He could hear voices, and it seemed to him that the voices expressed agitation, though he would have discovered agitation in the nibblings of a mouse. He felt urged towards the stairs; he wanted news; he was growing most horribly afraid of the apprehensive silence and of that closed door.

He had his foot on the first step of the stairs when the door above opened. Chisholm came out. He began to descend. His solid figure had a hurriedness; its very shadow was alarming. He was coatless, with his shirt-sleeves rolled up; his hands and forearms were stained with something.

He seemed to float noiselessly down the stairs. He began to speak before he reached Hazzard.

"Sorry. Ring up Steel—will you? Tell him to come round at once, and bring a transfusion apparatus."

Hazzard stood staring. Dimly he was aware of Chisholm's face as a white and rather scared surface.

"Something wrong?"

"Post-partum, bad. Absolutely astonishing. I've stopped it, but——"

"Tell me."

"She's almost pulseless. Ring up Steel. We must get that pulse back. No. 27 Queen Anne Street. Get Steel. I'll speak."

III

They had told him that Ruth was dying.

He did not believe it; he could not believe it.

"Let me see her; I must see her."

But they would not suffer him to see her. There remained a chance, a flicker of hope, and no breath of emotion could be allowed to disturb it.

The nurse came down to him with the child. He had not thought of the child. It was a boy.

He looked at the creature in the white shawl.

"I don't want to see it. Take it away."

He went out into the Square and walked. He went round and round, keeping close to the iron railings of the Square garden. His mouth felt dry. And as he walked it seemed to him that he ceased to be a body, a creature with eyes and ears and muscles; he was a

little vapour of consciousness drifting round and round like some disembodied and unhappy spirit under the dim trees. Reality had ceased for him, or rather there was but one reality, his dying wife and his bewilderment, and a kind of horror of incredulity. He was like a little, frightened, whimpering boy crying, "Mother, mother."

He wanted Ruth. He was suffering. And his impulse was to run to that gentle, watchful creature, just as in his small boy days he had run to his mother. But that was the horror of it. There was no Ruth to run to; it was because of Ruth that this horror of helplessness possessed him; he was losing the one creature to whom he would have hurried for comfort, in this hour of anguish. He had no one to go to.

This loneliness!

Once, for fully half a minute he stood leaning against the railings, clasping his head. How still everything was! London was sleeping, and it seemed dead. It was dead, dead so far as he was concerned. There were no people in the world when you came to the edge of the great silence and stood there quite alone. Such solitude, such pain, such stillness.

He blurted out an "Oh, my God," and went on walking. He felt that he must go on walking for ever, round and round, with no purpose left, no guidance. Was anything real? Were those dark houses real? And those silly stars? Was this ghastly business real, that red flood, Chisholm's bleached, scared and astonished face, the telephone bell, Steel with his bag and his air of nervous briskness, that bundle of a baby, himself? Absurd, ghastly, shattering catastrophe!

He went round and round, and then he realized that all the windows in the Square were dark, rows and rows of dead eyes. But there was one lighted window, a yellow oblong. He stood and stared at it. He realized that it was Ruth's window.

Light.

But how long would that light last?

Was that his house, the house she had chosen for him? And she was lying there dying, and they would not let him see her.

He was being hurt too terribly. He cursed.

"Damn them—damn them, I must see her."

He rushed suddenly across the road. He had left the blue door open, and he passed in, leaving it open. He was half-way up the stairs when he became aware of Chisholm standing above as though waiting for him.

"I want to see my wife. I've got to see her."

His voice was harsh. He had the fierceness of a man scaling the wall of a fortress.

A hand fastened on the lapel of his coat and held him.

"Keep quiet. You can't. You'll kill her. She has rallied a little. Come in here and sit down."

He drew Hazzard with him into the room and pushed him into a chair.

Chapter Thirty-eight

I

SOMEWHERE about four in the morning Hazzard fell asleep in his wife's chair, and Chisholm, with grey stubble on his chin, and looking worn and square and with all the round buxomness gone from him, left him asleep in that chair. The nurse followed Sir Berkeley to the street door. He was going home for a bath and shave and some breakfast. The dawn was coming up, and the trees were changing from grey to green.

"I shall be back about eight. I'll get my nursing home to send someone round to relieve you."

The nurse looked as tired as the doctor.

"Oh, I'll stick it out, Sir Berkeley. I want her to pull through. I suppose there is a chance?"

"One in three. It was one in ten five hours ago. By God, she's given me the fright of my life, flooding like that. Oh, by the way—the husband has gone to sleep in the drawing-room. I think you had better turn the key on him."

"Poor little man."

"He was beginning to lose his head. I had to take him by the collar. Yes, lock him in. He mustn't see her till I give him leave."

Chisholm went out into the grey of the dawn, like a ship-master who had met a sudden squall in the night after years of sailing in placid seas. He looked square instead of round, and his blue eyes had a bleakness. The nurse slipped up the stairs and peeped into the drawing-room and saw Hazzard asleep in the arm-chair, his head fallen to one side, his hands hanging. Even in sleep he suggested hopelessness, exhaustion.

The nurse withdrew the key from the inside of the door, reinserted it, and softly locked him in. She left the key in the door, and went on upstairs, rocking slightly from side to side, a woman who was very tired.

II

Hazzard woke about seven. The sun was shining. He looked at the clock, and also he might have seen himself in the mirror as a little, haggard, untidy-headed man, but the eyes of his spirit were elsewhere. He walked to the door and found it locked.

He stood holding the door-handle and reflecting. Now why had they locked that door? Had it been locked on purpose or by chance? His consciousness was preternaturally clear, as it is at times after pain or fasting, and behind that locked door he perceived a purpose. They would not have locked him in had his wife been dead.

But had he lost his head so badly? He felt a little ashamed, but mingling with his shame, and penetrating it, was hope, the courage of the morning. He crossed the room to one of the windows and raised the lower sash, and became aware of a familiar sound. He leaned out and looked down, and saw Elizabeth in a blue print dress, on her hands and knees, whitening the steps. So life went on. And he stood there in the freshness of the morning and wondered, and was moved and touched as never before by the simple things of life. Also, it seemed to him that the September morning was so alive and so beautiful that hope could not be dead.

A milkman hurried along the pavement. Milk-o! And Elizabeth arose from her knees and met him; she had a jug ready.

"Fine morning, miss."

"It needs be. We've had a night of it here."

Hazzard drew back from the window, and stood stroking his unshaven chin. He was listening. He heard footsteps in the room overhead, Ruth's room. Someone came down the stairs and paused outside the drawing-room door, and he heard the key turned. So that locked door had been meant.

The footsteps went on and down the stairs, and Hazzard waited until he heard the voices of Elizabeth and the nurse in conversation. He opened the door two inches.

"She's asleep now. It's the best thing. We want the house kept quiet."

"What can I get her, nurse? The milk's just come."

"Have some warm milk ready, and some Brand's essence. Do you know how to make egg albumen?"

"No."

"I'll show you. And how's the baby?"

"He's God's own dove. I've been cuddlin' 'im by the kitchen fire. 'E 'asn't made a sound. Nurse, she's going to get through, isn't she? It'd be too terrible."

"We don't know yet. We're hoping."

Hazzard opened the door. And then he remembered that he was wearing his boots; he had gone to sleep in them; and he knelt down and removed first one boot and then the other, and, carrying them, crept up the stairs and past that sacred door to the bath-

room. He felt rather like a little, disgraced boy in a house full of women. He ran the hot water into the basin as though the slightest gurgle or splash would be overheard. He took off his collar and tie, and shaved himself, and washed, and dealt with his untidy head. Emerging from the bathroom with his boots in his hand, he descended the stairs to the hall, and sitting down on the bottom step, he put on his boots.

Elizabeth was laying the breakfast-table. He heard the clink of a cup, and knives and forks being arranged. He went in.

"Good morning, Elizabeth."

"Good morning, sir."

He felt a small person of no consequence.

"I am getting your breakfast, sir."

"Thank you, Elizabeth."

Somehow he was glad of her red hands, and her kind red face, and her blue print frock. He was grateful to her for these realities. He was grateful to her for her reticence, for Elizabeth was not by nature a reticent person. He went and stood at one of the windows, and saw the familiar trees and the iron railings and the distant houses, and the smoke ascending from chimneys, and it all seemed strange. Time was relative.

A few hours ago he had been walking round and round close to those iron railings. A hundred years might have elapsed.

Elizabeth entered the room. She carried a tray. She placed the teapot on the table, and a plate with a Britannia metal cover. She removed the cover.

"Bacon and eggs, sir."

Astonishing realities! Bacon and eggs—two eggs. And Ruth was sleeping. Oh, blessed, strengthening sleep!

He sat down to breakfast.

III

At eight o'clock Sir Berkeley arrived in a taxi with a nurse. He looked a different Sir Berkeley; he had shaved and breakfasted; he had recovered his gloss and his rotundity, and Hazzard, who was at the window watching like a small boy, felt encouraged by that buxom, prosperous figure.

They met in the hall.

"Good morning, Hazzard."

Hazzard was silence and all eyes.

"Nurse upstairs?"

"I think so."

"Any news?"

"I believe my wife's asleep."

"Good."

He left his very sleek hat on the table and went up with the new nurse, and once more Hazzard was left dangling at the end of a thread of suspense. The house seemed full of people who had work to do, and he had quite forgotten that he had work to do. The man in him had effaced the physician.

He waited. He stood at the window; he walked round and round the breakfast-table; he was aware of the front-door bell ringing. Elizabeth appeared with a message. Mr. Mack had sent to inquire after Mrs. Hazzard, and Hazzard looked perplexed, and told Elizabeth to tell the messenger that he would send word to Mr. Mack later.

Would Chisholm never come down those stairs?

And Sir Berkeley, descending, found Hazzard standing on the hearthrug and watching him with eyes that waited.

"Better news, Hazzard. She has rallied."

Hazzard had the look of a man striving to say something, but no words came.

"We are not out of the wood yet. By George, she frightened me pretty badly. I suppose she has never had anything of the kind before?"

"Never."

"Well, I hope it is the last. I suppose it is her idiosyncrasy. I shouldn't risk it again."

"I shan't."

Chisholm's confidence had returned, and with it his debonairness, and when Hazzard followed him to the door and asked almost humbly if he might see his wife, Chisholm looked at him kindly.

"Depends on how she feels. Perhaps about eleven o'clock. Just for half a minute. Of course you won't upset her. I shall be round about midday."

Hazzard closed the door on the great man, and was met in the hall by Elizabeth with a white bundle and a "This is the greatest thing in the World" smile.

"Don't you want to see 'im, sir?"

Hazzard bent to look at his son. Elizabeth drew the edges of the shawl aside and uncovered the little, grotesque face. The thing yawned; its eyes were screwed up; it had an absurd dark down on its head. And Hazzard looked at it and marvelled and had not a word to say. He had looked at hundreds of such babies, but this was Ruth's baby and his.

"Ain't he a little dove, sir? 'E's got blue eyes."

Elizabeth made absurd and endearing noises. She glowed; her plain, red face had a beauty.

"Funny little devil," said Hazzard.

Elizabeth looked shocked. Funny little devil, indeed!

IV

When Hazzard entered his wife's room he was most strangely struck by her beauty. It was as though he had not realized it before. She lay there looking at him, with a still and brilliant pallor, dark eyes, and her hair in a wreath about her forehead. It was an ethereal loveliness, a bloodless beauty as of another world. Her hair seemed to cloud down over her shoulders.

He said, "Don't move, Ruthie."

He saw her as woman transfigured, half spirit, half body, while she saw nothing but his poor, frightened face.

"Chris."

He crossed to the bed. He put out a hand, but he seemed afraid to touch her. That bleeding might recur. He just stood and looked.

But her right hand moved over the clothes towards him, and very gently and with a kind of fear he laid his hand upon hers.

"I'm so tired, Chris, I'm so tired."

His face quivered as though he was about to break down. He made a supreme effort. His eyes felt hot and moist.

"Ruthie—stay with me. I want you. I can't get on without you."

She sighed and smiled.

"My dear one."

V

From that moment there was a change in her. She had seen her husband's poor, frightened, bewildered face.

When Hazzard had gone, she looked at the door, and then at the nurse who had come to the bedside with a feeding-cup.

"Nurse, my husband wants me. I'm going to get well."

Roper's Row

It might be said that one of the major characteristics of Warwick Deeping's work is its fidelity to life—and this not only in its emotional aspects and in its delineation of character, but in its description of scenes and places and events. Never has this characteristic been better evidenced than in Roper's Row. Even if we had not known that Major Deeping was himself a physician, it would be impossible not to realize that these scenes in London hospitals, in Harley Street consulting rooms, in the shabby lodgings which medical students of twenty years ago inhabited, are infused with an atmosphere of the utmost reality, the very breath of truth. And as Warwick Deeping adds others to the number of those books which have made him famous wherever the English language is read, perhaps his admirers will realize that in him they have not merely a writer of stories, but a novelist who is adding vivid pages to the records which mirror for posterity his time and ours.

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